



## Marital incompatibility among couples living in rural Gonabad and underlying factors

Fateme Pirnahad<sup>1</sup>, Moslem Armanmehr<sup>2</sup>, Seyedeh Mahla Hejazi<sup>3</sup>,  
Noorallah Moradi<sup>4</sup>, Enayat Hooshmand<sup>5</sup>, Vajihe Armanmehr<sup>6</sup>

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1. Department of Science, School of Human Science, University of Gonabad, Gonabad, Iran
2. Department of Industrial Engineering, School of Health, Gonabad University of Medical Sciences, Gonabad, Iran
3. Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Payame Noor University (PNU), Tehran, Iran
4. Department of Family Health, Social Development & Health Promotion Research Center, Gonabad University of Medical Sciences, Gonabad, Iran.
5. Foreign Language and Linguistics Department, Isfahan University, Isfahan, Iran
6. **Correspondence to:** Social Determinants of Health Research Center, Gonabad University of Medical Science, Gonabad, Iran  
Email: varmanmehr@gmail.com

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### Abstract

Iranian families face many challenges these days. This study aimed to examine marital incompatibility and underlying factors among couples in rural Gonabad based on sociological views and socio-cultural characteristics of the villagers. The study collected data by using questionnaires. The statistical population included 380 married men and women living in the villages of Gonabad county. The samples were selected through cluster sampling method proportional to size. Preliminary interviews and a researcher-made questionnaire were used in order to collect the data. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were confirmed through face validity and Cronbach's alpha coefficient, respectively. The mean age of the participants and their mean age at marriage were 39 and 21 years, respectively. An equal percentage of males and females participated in the present study. The results of multivariate regression analysis showed that three out of five hypotheses on the relationship between independent and dependent variables could not be rejected. These three hypotheses suggested a significant direct relationship between conflict of values and marital incompatibility, and a significant inverse relationship of fulfillment of needs and family social capital with marital incompatibility. The two variables of Role Strain and Homogamy were not significantly correlated with the independent variable. In view of the influence of changes in the modern era over the needs and expectations of people, it is necessary to provide rural couples with education appropriate to cultural context of their society.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Marital Incompatibility, Social Capital

### Introduction

Family, as the smallest social unit, is the basis of social structure and maintains human relationships. Interpersonal relationships within families pave the way for the formation of behavioral patterns and direct many behavioral decisions and social relations. Behavioral patterns of institutions involve solutions for managing behaviors and resolving behavioral

conflicts [1]. One of the most important functions of the family is to satisfy the physical and psychological needs of couples. Couples in families with well-performed functions often have a sense of satisfaction with each other and are compatible. Adaptive and satisfying relationships are based on empathy, love, mutual respect, and supporting

and accepting one another. According to some studies, compatible couples have higher degrees of physical intimacy [2].

Compatibility between couples affects many individual and social aspects of an individual's life [3]. At individual level, couples who are more compatible have better physical and mental health, while couples with low compatibility lack mental balance and peace, and the prevalence of aggressive behaviors and depression is more common among them [4]. In addition, compatibility in marriage improves the children's relationship with each other and with their parents and reinforces adaptation and compatibility among children. Generally, couples who are not good partners for each other can hardly become good parents [5]. On the contrary, parental conflicts create stress, fear, and anger in children and cause physical and behavioral problems in long-term [6].

Iranian families face many challenges these days and their functions have been seriously impaired. Changes in the status of women and their role, increased rate of divorce, lower marriage and childbearing rates, changing attitudes toward spouses, centrality of family decision-making in the community, weakening of religious beliefs, and loss of confidence have led to conflicts in Iranian families [7]. Consequently, marital satisfaction and compatibility have weakened.

One of the factors underlying the family health and strengthening the couple's relationships is having a family of high social capital. According to Bourdieu, family is the most important source of accumulation and transfer of social capital. Coleman believes that certain types of social structures facilitate the selection of individual actions more than others. Accordingly, he introduces family as the historic element of social capital [8]. Lowry recognizes social capital as a set of resources existing in the nature of family relationships and social organizations that is useful for the cognitive and social development of children and adolescents. According to Amato, parents' relationship with each other, getting help from parents for solving personal problems, talking

and interacting with parents, and love and intimacy are considered as very important indicators that measure the family social capital [9]. It seems that Iranian families' social capital has undergone some changes, such as reduced family social support, emergence of diversity in communication networks particularly outside the family, reduced solidarity in neighborhood relations, increased use of virtual and media interactions instead of face to face interactions, loss of confidence, and increased extramarital relationships.

Some theorists believe that lack of balance between "wants and haves" leads to a sense of dissatisfaction and conflicts between couples. Men and women marry with specific ideas about marital life and begin it with specific expectations about their spouses' behaviors. If the spouse's behaviors and characteristics are contrary to their pre-defined assumptions and expectations, and an individual is not capable of quickly changing his/her mind in favor of adapting to the new situation, they will result in a sense of dissatisfaction and eventually lead to family conflict [10].

According to another theory, family stability results from the existence of similar characteristics between husbands and wives [11]. Assimilation of two people not only attracts them to each other, but also makes their bond stronger whereas dissimilarity between couples is the source of family conflicts [12].

When the family members have different personal characteristics and are culturally different, their different attitudes and behaviors will likely affect their incompatibility.

From the perspective of social capital, a group of people who truly trust one another cooperate more than those who lack such trust. It seems that social capital in families and between couples can improve the marital compatibility [13].

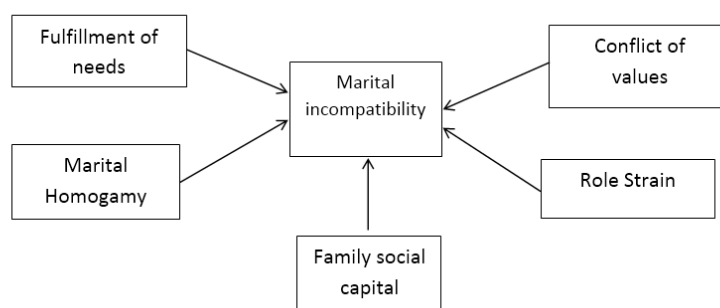
Previous studies have mainly investigated the marital incompatibility and conflicts from the perspective of psychology and personality traits. For example, Chen et al. conducted a

study on 66 Japanese couples to examine the relationship between individual characteristics and marital compatibility. The results indicated that individual characteristics and personality traits of the partner can predict the compatibility of marital relationships [14]. Charanya [15] also reported that factors, such as openness to experience, accountability, adaptation, anxious attachment, social absorption, and Socio-sexuality can affect marital satisfaction. Kilman also concluded that women who have less marital satisfaction are more likely to have schizoid, narcissistic, anti-social, and sadistic personality disorders [16]. These results are consistent with the results of Shahmoradi et al. [17]. According to some studies, there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction [18,19].

The statistical population of the present study included the residents of the villages of Gonabad, located at southern Khorasan Razavi Province. A census carried out in 2011

estimated the population of this county to be 80783 people. In recent years, the rate of urbanization outstripped the ruralization rate for the first time in Gonabad. Moreover, the establishment of a significant number of higher education institutions in Gonabad has changed the former traditional sociocultural context. Although the changes in the modern era and their consequences have penetrated the cities more than villages and divorce rates tend to be lower in rural areas than in urban areas, it seems that with the development of communications, increased mobility, and removal of borders, the urban culture has penetrated the villages, and the new values and conditions have challenged the traditional family values and patterns.

This study aimed to review the field and preliminary studies in order to examine the marital incompatibility among couples living in rural Gonabad and its underlying factors (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Visual representation of research hypotheses

**Method**

This analytical cross-sectional study was conducted on married men and women living in the villages of Gonabad County in 2012. Considering the population of the villages of Gonabad which was 31586 people and based on the Cochran’s formula, the sample size was calculated as 380. The subjects were selected through cluster sampling method proportional to size; so, nine villages out of 53 were randomly selected considering two criteria of geographical distribution (assuming

that geographical situation may affect the sociocultural status), and divorce rate (considering lowest and highest divorce rate as an objective indicator of incompatibility during the past three years). The respondents, with equal numbers of men and women, were already married for at least 6 months.

The data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire. Exploratory and preliminary interviews were first conducted to more emphasize rural culture and community.

To this end, two groups of ordinary people and village officials (including clergymen, governors, and rural council) were interviewed. Then, the most important variables affecting marital incompatibility were selected and assessed by doing a literature review and evaluating theoretical resources. The validity of the scales was assessed using face validity. The questions designed based on the exploratory and theoretical studies were provided to family sociology and consultation experts for their approval. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure reliability. The theoretical and operational definitions and alpha coefficient of each of the main variables are briefly explained as follows:

*Marital incompatibility:* Incompatible actions are those that the doer (i.e. couple) mainly intends to extend the conflict with the other party [10]. Marital incompatibility was assessed in three dimensions, including loss of interaction with others, loss of interaction with the spouse, and conflicting interaction. The alpha coefficient for marital incompatibility was 0.74.

*Conflict of values:* It refers to the couples' differences of opinion on a value. This variable was assessed by splitting it into the dimensions of religious behaviors, sexual and matrimonial matters, division of labor, recreation, travelling, and socializing with other people. The resulting alpha coefficient for this variable was 0.68.

*Fulfillment of needs:* It refers to an imbalance between "wants" and "haves". The failure to satisfy the needs may lead to frustration between couples and negatively affect their compatibility. This variable was assessed in four emotional, financial, sexual, and dignity dimensions. The alpha coefficient for non-fulfillment of needs was 0.90.

*Family social capital:* Social capital refers to some features of social organization such as trust and participation that can facilitate the performance of the society through appropriate actions [20]. The present study assessed the family social capital in terms of couples' trust, participation, and the amount and quality of their communication with relatives. The alpha

coefficient for family social capital was 0.90. *Role Strain:* It refers to heavy workload in a position, or in other words, it refers to an excessive amount of tasks to be done in a social position [10]. The resulting alpha coefficient for this variable was 0.65.

*Homogamy:* It refers to homogeneity and similarity between spouses in terms of features, such as socio-economic status, level of education, age difference, etc. [12]. This variable was examined in the dimensions of individual similarity (education and age) and family resemblance (in terms of parental education and financial status). The alpha coefficient for Homogamy was 0.60.

The data were entered into SPSS 16. Frequency distribution tables and measures of central tendency and dispersion were used to describe the data and multivariate regression model was employed to analyze the data.

Informed consent forms were obtained prior to data collection. Participants were not forced to participate or complete the questionnaires and they could withdraw from the study at any time. The questionnaires were distributed and completed anonymously so as to keep the information confidential.

## Results

The most important findings of the exploratory and field studies are first summarized as follows:

- The main reasons for dissatisfaction with the husband and the causes of conflicts from women's perspective included: 1) Inability of men to control their anger and negative emotions in the family; 2) Interference of the husband's family in couples' personal life which has its most adverse effects during the initial years of marriage; 3. Being compared with others especially in terms of physical attractiveness and sex appeal and changes in men's sexual preference.
- The main reasons for dissatisfaction with the wife and the causes of conflicts from men's perspective included: 1) Women's high financial expectations which are often

interpreted by men as vying with others; 2) Failing to meet the men’s sexual expectations (for reasons such as women’s negligence about sexual issues and understating; carelessness about their appearance or altering it to others’ liking).

- Rural women blamed women for precipitating marital conflicts. Most of them believed in tolerance and compromise from women as the solution to enhance marital relationship and strengthen their bond. On the other hand, rural men felt less sense of responsibility towards their marital problems and made less effort to change and improve themselves.
- It seems that the way rural men and women welcome changes does not match each other.

This would create different expectations and needs. For example, men ask for changes of appearance and new ways to satisfy their sexual needs by women, while women desire to consume new goods and new ways of parenting.

- In general, the rural people tended to be less willing to have control over their lives especially in front of external events. This might be explained by their fatalistic views.

The most important quantitative findings are presented as follows:

The following table provides some information on participants’ current age, age at marriage, number of children, and education level:

**Table1** *Distribution of age at marriage in terms of gender*

Statistics	Age of respondents	Age at marriage	Number of children	Years of schooling
Mean	39	21	2.6	8.2
Median	36	21	2	8
Mode	30	20	1	12

**Table2** *Distribution of respondents according to independent and dependent variables*

	Fulfillment of needs	Family social capital	Marital Homogamy	Conflict of values	Role Strain	Marital incompatibility
Very low	1.1	1.6	2.6	26.6	14.7	58.2
Low	3.7	3.2	38.7	26.6	40.0	16.6
Medium	13.2	25.3	33.4	26.3	30.0	17.6
High	49.5	50.7	21.1	15.5	7.1	5.3
Very high	29.8	19.2	3.4	4.7	0.5	1.6
Missing data	5.8		0.8	0.3	7.6	0.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

The present study employed multivariate regression analysis with backward elimination. This method requires all independent variables to be first entered into the equation. Then, the variables with the least impact and level of significance are excluded from the equation in

an ascending order. After the exclusion of each variable, the parameters of regression model are calculated with the remaining variables. The elimination of the least significant variables continues until variables with acceptable significance level remain in the model.

**Table 3** *The summary of multivariate regression model of marital incompatibility*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig
1	0.463	0.21	0.202	18.07	0.000
2	0.461	0.21	0.203	22.49	0.000

**Table 4** *The significance of coefficients in the model explaining the marital incompatibility*

Model	Variables	Non-standard impact coefficient (B)	Standard impact coefficient (Beta)	T- value	Sig (Significance level)	Zero-order correlation	Partial correlation
1	Fulfillment of needs	-0.129	-0.135	-2.50	0.013	-0.28	-0.13
	conflict of values	0.177	0.148	2.53	0.012	0.31	0.13
	Role Strain	0.098	0.135	0.72	0.47	0.08	0.04
	Family social capital	-0.382	-0.306	-5.60	0.00	-0.40	-0.29
	Homogamy	-0.165	-0.083	-1.70	0.090	-0.03	-0.09
2	Fulfillment of needs	-0.130	-0.135	-2.51	0.01	-0.28	-0.12
	conflict of values	0.183	0.148	2.65	0.00	0.31	0.12
	Family social capital	-0.382	-0.305	-5.60	0.00	-0.40	-0.27
	Homogamy	-0.165	-0.083	-1.70	0.09	-0.03	-0.08

According to Table 4, the multiple correlation coefficient (R) was 0.46, indicating that the five variables including family social capital, Homogamy, Role Strain, fulfillment of needs, and conflict of values were simultaneously correlated with marital incompatibility. Coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) was 0.21, which means that about 21% of the changes in marital incompatibility are explained by the five independent variables mentioned above and the rest depends on other factors that have not been studied in this research.

In order to understand the intensity and direction of the effects of independent variables on marital incompatibility more precisely, the impact coefficients are presented in a table of regression model. According to this table, the relative importance of each independent variable in explaining the dependent variable changes is measured by regression coefficients or weights. Five independent variables were first entered into the equation in order to estimate the level of marital incompatibility. Then, the variable of Role Strain was excluded using the backward elimination method. After elimination of this variable, no changes were observed in multiple correlation coefficient and its value remained as 0.46. It can also be seen that the most powerful predictors are family social capital (Beta=-0.306), conflict of values (Beta=0.14), and fulfillment of needs (Beta=-0.13), in sequence.

Partial correlation method is applied to analyze the relationship between each of the independent variables and the dependent variable, through which the actual correlation between the two variables of interest is measured by removing the effects of the control variables. The Table presents an estimate of the correlation between each independent variable and the dependent variable (marital incompatibility) after controlling four other variables:

The correlation between fulfillment of needs and marital incompatibility almost reduced by half after controlling other independent variables. It means that the value reached from -0.28 to -0.13.

By excluding and removing the effects of family social capital, marital Homogamy, Role Strain, and fulfillment of needs, the correlation between conflict of values and marital incompatibility reduced from 0.31 to 0.13.

The correlation between Role Strain and marital incompatibility decreased from 0.08 to 0.04 by controlling the impact of family social capital, Homogamy, fulfillment of needs, and conflict of values.

By applying partial correlation and excluding the contribution of other variables, the actual correlation between family social capital and marital incompatibility was measured as -0.40, indicating a significant decrease in comparison with the previous value (-0.29).

By excluding the variables of fulfillment of needs, conflict of values, Role Strain, and family social capital, the correlation between Homogamy and marital incompatibility gave the value of -0.09, indicating an increase by 0.06 in comparison with its previous value (-0.03).

Marital incompatibility = -0.130 (fulfillment of needs) +0.148 (conflict of values) -0.305 (family social capital) -0.083 (Homogamy)

In the above equation, the beta weights indicate that for every unit increase in the standard deviation of the fulfillment of needs, conflict of values, and Homogamy, standard deviation of the dependent variable, i.e. marital incompatibility, decreased by 0.130, 0.305, and 0.083, respectively. However, for every unit increase in standard deviation of conflict of values, standard deviation of marital incompatibility increased by 0.148.

## Discussion

This research studied the marital incompatibility of couples living in rural Gonabad and its affecting factors. The results indicated that three out of five independent variables including family social capital, Homogamy, Role Strain, fulfillment of needs, and conflict of values were correlated with marital incompatibility. Conflict of values, which is opposite to shared values, was one of these variables and any increase in that variable would increase the couples' incompatibility. When the members of a social organization, including a family, do not have the same values and beliefs, their expectations and norms will be inconsistent with each other [21]. This has been also confirmed in previous studies and it has been suggested that couples' shared values play a major role in their satisfaction with marital life [10,22]. According to Brunner and Hugh, shared culture and values of couples can affect their marital satisfaction and compatibility [23]. Social capital was another independent variable in the study that had a significant inverse correlation with marital incompatibility and was assessed at both internal and external levels. Family internal capital includes participation of couples in decision making, communicating

with and trusting in the spouse; whereas the family external capital includes the quality of communication with relatives.

Some previous studies have confirmed that dialogue (especially an effective dialogue) can reduce marital conflicts [24]. A few previous studies have evaluated the quality of relationship between couples and their relatives and the role of families in marital conflicts [25-27]. The relationship between fulfillment of needs and marital incompatibility was not rejected in the present study. Therefore, if couples' needs and expectations of their spouse and married life are not fulfilled, frustration, dissatisfaction, tension, and conflicts will increase between them [10]. Some researchers believe that conflict is a process during which one party recognizes that his/her interests are suppressed by the other party [28]. Some studies have reported results consistent with this finding. For example, Clone and Ralph reported that there is an inverse relationship between female-demand/male-withdraw pattern and women's satisfaction [29]. The other rejected hypothesis assuming the relationship between Homogamy and marital incompatibility was assessed at two individual (age and education resemblance) and family (family resemblance in terms of education and financial status) levels. According to the Homogamy theory, increased similarity and congruence between couples stabilize and strengthen families [12]. On the contrary, differences are the sources of family conflicts. Therefore, one of the interesting and noteworthy results of this study was that Homogamy did not significantly affect the incompatibility of couples in rural areas although there was a lot of difference between couples, and about 40% of participants reported Homogamy as low and very low – especially in terms of age and education. Despite the inconsistency of this result with those of previous studies [11,30], it seems that differences between the study couples did not encourage superiority and dispute. Thus, it is important to further study the value system and roles of rural population and how couples interpret their differences to avoid conflicts.

The hypothesis assuming the relationship between Role Strain and marital incompatibility was also rejected. Role Strain is a situation in which expectations of one goes beyond his/her ability. Previous studies reported an inverse relationship between Role Strain and satisfaction [8]. The results of this study indicated that most importantly, the villagers do not feel the burden of Role Strain. Moreover, Role Strain would not increase tension and marital incompatibility. However, through preliminary and exploratory interviews, we found that rural women do relatively heavy workloads. For example, most rural women participate in agricultural and farming activities, in addition to doing the house chores and taking care of children. Therefore, having heavy workload as an objective matter should be distinguished from the feeling overloaded as a subjective matter. In spite of having many responsibilities, the villagers hardly feel exhausted. This issue can be answered in another study by evaluating many different hypotheses. There are several reasons that can explain no occurrence of fatigue and boredom despite the high workload of rural population, including having the spirit of accepting assigned roles, attitudes toward their roles and acceptance, higher participation in the labor process, which is known as the desire of human nature that prevents alienation by Marx, membership of villagers in informal organizations where the elements of participation, trust, and group cooperation are high, working in the natural, not mechanical, environments and so on.

### **Conclusion**

This study was conducted to examine marital incompatibility of couples living in rural Gonabad. Literature review showed that our study is the first research of its kind conducted on this statistical population. The results of exploratory studies indicated that some ethics and values of rural population are associated with the strength or weakness of the family that deserves to be the subject of future studies. Values, such as high level of interpersonal trust, low spirit of individualism, etc., can strengthen the family, whereas values such as men's totalitarian style,

lack of effective dialogues in the family, etc., can weaken the family.

It is recommended that studies follow each other in a chain, i.e. each new study begins from the ending point and conclusion of the previous study, as it is the only way to achieve the maximum efficiency of a study. Although rural people may appear simple and unpretentious, their specific ethos and values such as modesty, shyness, being principled, conservatism, etc., as well as their little familiarity with the objectives and ethics of the research, complicate studying them accurately and make the qualitative methods more efficient.

It is recommended to investigate the mechanisms and procedures that create a relationship between independent variables and marital incompatibility.

It is also recommended to conduct comparative studies between the urban and rural families in order to achieve a better and more accurate perspective of the issues of rural society and rural family structure. What is obvious is that despite the exposure to modernity, villagers will not become modern as people in cities are.

### **Contribution**

Study design: FP, VA

Data collection and analysis: MA, SMH, NM, EH

Manuscript preparation: FP, VA, MA

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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