



Determine the contribution of conflict resolution styles in predicting marital commitment

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Journal of Research & Health
Social Development & Health Promotion
Research Center
Vol. 6, No. 4, Sep & Oct 2016
Pages: 438- 444
DOI: 10.7508/jrh.2016.04.009
Original Article

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Received: 20 Sep 2014

Accepted: 18 Dec 2014

How to cite this article: Shakarami M, Zahrakar K, Mohsenzadeh F. Determine the contribution of conflict resolution styles in prediction of marital commitment. *J Research & Health* 2016; 6(4): 438- 444.

Abstract

Family is the most important pillar of a society, whose stability requires the couples' commitment to each other. Difficulties and disagreements in married life are natural and how to resolve these conflicts can cause either stability or instability of the couples' life. This descriptive-correlational study was conducted to investigate the predictive role of conflict resolution styles in marital commitment. The population included all married staff working in Farabi hospital in Tehran. Among all, 221 participants were selected through random sampling method based on the sample size formula. To collect data, the marital commitment questionnaire and the Rahim organizational conflict inventory-B were used. The results showed that there was a significant correlation between the constructive and non-constructive conflict resolution styles and the marital commitment and conflict resolution styles predict about 14% of changes in marital commitment that is statistically significant. By teaching the conflict resolution styles to couples, we can indirectly increase their marital commitment in addition to helping them solve their conflicts.

Keywords: Conflict, Education, Marriage

Introduction

Marital commitment, as a feeling of persistence in attractions and restrictions [1], shows the nature of dependence of a person on a relationship and how much the person feels safe in a relationship and to what extent he feels that the relationship is valuable in the long run. According to Johnson [2], marital commitment includes three dimensions: personal commitment, moral commitment, and structural commitment. Personal commitment means one's interest in continuing the marital relationship. This commitment reflects the person's perceptions of his/her partner,

relationship, as well as the importance of the relationship for the person's identity [3]. Moral commitment indicates the extent to which the person feels committed to continue the relationship. The fundamental beliefs and values of a person about the proper behavior in the relationship are based on this type of commitment [1]. Structural commitment means that the person feels he should stay in a relationship due to external conditions [4]. The basic fact in a married life is that all couples face difficulties, but some couples are more capable of resolving their problems

than other couples. That is why the way we deal with problems can usually be more problematic compared with the problems themselves [5]. Rahim [6] knows the conflict resolution styles as conflict management strategies that the person uses when facing conflicts. Every person has a unique way to deal with conflicts. Trying to understand our own style and motives, as well as those of our partner can significantly contribute to constructive conflict resolution. If a marital relationship wishes to continue dynamically, conflicts must be resolved in the right way. Although conflicts may be normal statistically, they should not be led to verbal and physical violence and should not be suppressed. If the spouses do not apply a constructive way to deal with the conflict, they may gradually separate from each other [7]. However, a conflict may be associated with negative emotions and considered a potential threat under some circumstances. The important point is that conflict is considered an opportunity for promoting intimacy and improving the relationships. Also, disagreement may give couples this chance to learn how to take advantage of constructive strategies of conflict resolution for meeting the needs of each other [8].

In this study, the concept of conflict resolution style provided by Blake and Mouton was used. Conceptualization and classification of interpersonal conflict resolution styles were first conducted by Blake and Mouton [7]. The aim of classification was to identify the intra-organizational conflict resolution styles. They examined the ways of dealing with conflicts based on two fundamental dimensions of concerns about ourselves and concerns about others. The first dimension explains to what extent (high or low) a person tries to meet his own concerns. The second dimension explains to what extent (high or low) a person tries to satisfy the concerns of others. Accordingly, the conflict resolution styles are classified into five styles, including integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. Integrating and obliging styles are classified as constructive, and dominating and avoiding

styles are classified as non-constructive. The constructive style is associated with some characteristics, including openness, exchanging information, examining the differences and finding solutions acceptable for both parties, trying to reduce differences, and focusing on commonalities to please themselves. The non-constructive style is associated with some characteristics, including competition, imposing behavior, withdrawal, assigning the responsibilities to the other person, staying away from conflict, waiving disagreements, and being neutral [6]. Although conflict is often considered negative, it can positively contribute to the quality of relationships and personal growth [9]. Studies have shown that if couples can manage conflicts in a positive way and have the ability to resolve them through proper ways, not only the conflict is not harmful, but also it can be useful for couples [5,10]. Couples, who have more constructive conflict resolution strategies, have greater satisfaction and marital commitment [11]. Compatible couples praise the positive actions of their spouses and can tolerate their negative actions more easily, and use the constructive conflict resolution style when facing conflicts. In contrast, incompatible couples think more about negative things, spend a lot of time on unpleasant aspects of their spouses, and ignore their positive and compensatory characteristics. Therefore, they use non-constructive conflict resolution styles [11]. So far, a number of studies have been conducted on the relationship between conflict resolution styles and marital commitment, and the concepts close to it. For example, the studies conducted by Bayrami *et al.* [11] and Askari *et al.* [12] indicated that the conflict resolution styles were associated with marital satisfaction. Gottman [13] reported that the relationship style of couples, especially when they deal with conflicts, affects the length of their marriage and marital satisfaction. By a comprehensive review of 115 longitudinal studies on marriage in the United States, Amato [14] presented a conceptual model

of self-healing factors leading to stability and improvement of marital quality. They found two general self-healing factors: personality traits and adaptive processes that include all methods couples use to cope with conflicts, and how they communicate and support each other, and the ways they think about the marriage, spouse, and their spouse's behavior. According to Canary and Kapch's study [13], it was reported that constructive verbal strategies help couples have a positive stance, express their feelings, seek the consent of the other party or agree on the issues, and have confidence in each other. Tang and Curran [4] also indicated that couples who are successful in resolving their problems, have stronger commitment. However, these studies have been mostly concerned with factors associated with marital commitment and no study has been conducted in the country to examine merely the relationship between these two variables. Several studies have emphasized the stressful conditions of hospital jobs and its impact on the family. Due to job pressures and other factors, the couples may be drawn into different directions and pursue different goals. Therefore, the time they spend together decreases and this separation is added to their mental workload and external sources of stress. Over time, the couples separate more from each other that it also affects their relationship both emotionally and physically [15]. Many studies have examined the relationship between work and love and the overflow of work-related stress to the family has been confirmed [15]. Mannheim and Shefrin [16] reported that hospital jobs disrupt the family life. According to the study of Lashington et al. [16], it was indicated that the nurses' shift work had negative consequences on their family and social issues, due to which their interpersonal conflicts with their spouses increased, their marital interactions decreased, and as a result, their marital quality reduced. Accordingly, dealing with the issues and problems which exist in the life of this stratum of society and helping to improve it is necessary, because the peace of mind of these people can directly impact on the delivery of services to patients.

Therefore, this study aimed to examine the role of conflict resolution styles in marital commitment of hospital staff.

Methods

This was a correlational study, whose population included all married staff (517) working in Farabi hospital in 2013, in Tehran. The number and list of people were given to the researchers. Therefore, 221 participants were selected through random sampling method based on Cochran's sample size formula. To conduct the research, the relevant permits were obtained and the necessary coordination was made with Farabi hospital officials. Then, the researcher collected the data by attending the hospital for one month. The importance, objectives, and methods of the study were explained to the participants and since the questionnaires were anonymous, they were assured of the confidentiality of their information and responses. The participants were asked to answer all questions carefully, patiently, and honestly. Thus, all participants entered the study with full informed consent. In this study, the following instruments were used to collect the data:

Marital Commitment Questionnaire (MCQ): This questionnaire was developed by Adams and Jones that measures three personal, moral, and structural dimensions. Adams and Jones calculated the reliability of each of the subscales of personal commitment, moral commitment, and structural commitment as 0.91, 0.89, and 0.86, respectively [17]. According to the study of Abbasi Molid et al. [17], the content validity of this questionnaire was confirmed. A 5-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree=1 to strongly agree=5) is used for scoring. The scores range from 1 to 172, and the higher score in this questionnaire indicates the high level of marital commitment. In this study, the internal reliability of the personal commitment, moral commitment, structural commitment, and the whole questionnaire was calculated as 0.85, 0.74, 0.82, and 0.88, respectively, through Cronbach's alpha.

Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-B (ROCI-B): To measure the conflict resolution styles, the second version of Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory was used. This 28-item scale includes 5 subscales (avoiding, compromising, dominating, obliging, and accompanying) which constitute three general subscales (constructive, non-constructive, and compromising conflict resolution styles). The reliability of this scale was reported as ranging from 0.72 to 0.83. The internal validity of this scale was estimated as 0.81 by the Cronbach's alpha [11]. In this study, the internal reliability of 0.73, 0.68, and 0.80 was obtained for the constructive and non-

constructive conflict resolution styles and the whole scale, respectively, based on the Cronbach's alpha.

The data were analyzed using stepwise multiple regression analysis in SPSS-18.

Results

Descriptive information of the participants are shown in Table 1. The mean age and standard deviation of the participants was 33.72 ± 8.66 and their duration of marriage was 8.47 ± 8.40 . The average marital commitment and constructive and non-constructive conflict resolution styles are also presented in the Table.

Table 1 Descriptive information of the participants

	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Age	33.72	8.66	23	53
Duration of marriage	8.47	8.40	1	30
Marital commitment	142.09	21.33	99	202
Constructive style	49.09	6.20	36	62
Non-constructive style	31.97	7.23	18	51

According to Table 2, the correlation between the constructive and non-constructive conflict resolution styles and the marital commitment is

significant ($p < 0.01$) and this positive correlation indicates that couples with higher level of commitment use more conflict resolution styles.

Table 2 The correlation matrix between the variables

	Constructive style	Non-constructive style	Marital commitment
Constructive style	1**	0.498**	0.335**
Non-constructive style	0.498**	1**	0.320**
Marital commitment	0.335**	0.320**	1**

** $p < 0.01$

To use regression analysis assumptions normal distribution of errors, independence errors, and multicollinearity were investigated. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality of the distribution of the errors showed that this distribution is normal ($z = 0.899, p > 0.05$). The Durbin – Watson (1.56) also confirmed the independence of errors. The tolerances achieved (0.75) also shows that multicollinearity between predictor variables less than that distort the results. According to abide by the assumptions of regression analysis results were presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows the results of the stepwise regression analysis. In the first step, the

constructive conflict resolution style, and in the second step, the non-constructive conflict resolution style was entered into the regression model.

In the above Table, the R value indicates the multiple correlation between conflict resolution styles and marital commitment. In the first step this value equals 0.335 for correlation between marital commitment and constructive style. R² represents the coefficient of determination or the amount of variance in the marital commitment that is explained by the conflict resolution styles and this is equal to 0.113 for the constructive style, i.e. about 11% of changes in marital commitment are explained

Table 3 The results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis on the prediction of marital commitment by the conflict resolution styles

Model	Statistics variables	B	S.E	β	T	R	R2	F	p
1	Constant value	85.44	10.57	-	8.08	-	-	29.16	0.001
	Constructive style	1.15	0.21	0.33	5.4	0.335	0.113		
2	Constant value	83.4	10.43	-	7.99	-	-	19.22	0.001
	Constructive style	0.80	0.24	0.23	3.31	0.379	0.144		
	Non-constructive style	0.60	0.20	0.20	2.88				

by constructive conflict resolution style. F and its significance level in the above table answer the question whether the variance explained by the predictor variables (conflict resolution styles) is statistically significant, or not? According to its value for the constructive style (F=29.16), it is significant at the $p < 0.01$ and accordingly, the constructive conflict resolution style can predict the marital commitment. But in the second step that the non-constructive style entered the model, the values of multiple correlation and the coefficient of determination changed to 0.379 and 0.144, respectively. It means that about 14% of changes in marital commitment are explained by these two conflict resolution styles. Also, B and β denote not-standardized coefficient and standardized regression coefficient, respectively, indicating the impact of the predictor variable on the regression equation and according to the t-values, it is observed that the effect of the variables of constructive and non-constructive conflict resolution styles is significant in both steps in the regression equation ($p < 0.001$). Since the value or magnitude of the regression coefficient is influenced by the variance of predictor variable, if other conditions are the same and the variances of independent variables are very different, the regression coefficient of the variable which has a greater variance compared to other variables becomes greater and thus, there will be the possibility of bias in the interpretation. To prevent this problem, the standardized regression coefficient is used, for calculation of which the standard scores of variables are used.

Discussion

The results of this study showed that constructive and non-constructive conflict

resolution styles explain 14.4% of changes in marital commitment and accordingly, the research hypothesis was confirmed. This is consistent with the results of Gottman’s study [13] that reported the relationship style of couples, especially when dealing with conflict, affects their duration of marriage and their satisfaction. It also matches with the study of Tang and Curran [4] that indicated couples who are successful in resolving their problems have stronger commitment, as well as the studies of Bayrami et al. [11] and Askari et al. [12].

For explaining the results obtained, it can be said that the ability of couples to manage and resolve conflicts can develop a strong relationship between couples and help them create an intimate relationship [18]. The constructive style for dealing with conflicts in marital relationship facilitates intimacy [19]. According to Weisz [20], positive interactive behaviors and patterns between couples, including positive attitude to each other, intimacy, encouragement, expressing emotions and paying attention to the feelings of each other, understanding each other’s needs, and supportive relationship in the family create intimacy between husband and wife, which is one of the components of the marital commitment.

On the other hand, the Equity theory states that as the perception of equality increases in the relationship between husband and wife, intimacy and pleasant feeling increase, as well. Therefore, when the couples manage the conflicts in their marital life and feel that justice prevails in their relationship and both of them receive the same reward and cost in their relationship, they will do their responsibilities with greater satisfaction, and this feeling that

their partner loves them and has adopted a fair behavior to please them increases satisfaction and quality of the marital relationship, and as a result, the level of commitment increases in them [21].

Strachman and Gobble [22] introduced two types of enthusiastic and moral commitments. Enthusiastic commitment means having interest in maintaining a marital relationship, enjoying the relationship, feeling comfortable in the married life, and taking responsibility for maintaining it. From this perspective, it can be stated that constructive conflict resolution styles lead to increased relationship satisfaction and accordingly, the person feels more satisfaction and pleasure in the relationship and tries to keep the relationship. Direct and adaptive verbal strategies help couples have a positive stance, express their emotions, seek the consent of the other party or agree on the issues, and have confidence in each other [13]. Therefore, they, as a team, will be able to experience the sense of accomplishment resulting from overcoming the problems together.

Good communication skills are among the most important factors of satisfaction in marital relationships. In fact, if couples learn how to communicate effectively, they will have more chances to experience satisfaction. Positive reactions often lead to vitality, happiness, and excitement in relationships. In contrast, incompatible couples think more about negative things, spend a lot of time on unpleasant aspects of their spouses, and have difficulty in understanding the positive and compensatory characteristics of their spouses and accordingly, they use non-constructive conflict resolution style [11]. The ability of the couples to resolve their conflicts is associated with maintaining the entire family system [23]. Therefore, as the couples function more efficiently, they will have better and more organized relationship. To the extent that couples are more successful in solving their conflicts, they will benefit from greater solidarity in their relationship. Accordingly, the power of factors causing conflicts is reduced and the couples move towards more positive

and effective interactions rather than conflicts [23].

Despite previous studies, in this study, a positive and significant correlation was found between non-constructive conflict resolution style and the marital commitment ($r=0.32$) indicating that conflict resolution (either positively or negatively) leads to the stability of the relationship. According to the systemic family therapy theories which state the negative feedbacks lead to maintaining the coupled system, non-constructive conflict resolution style is considered a negative feedback leading to the stability of the relationship.

Conclusion

Given that the family is one of the most important institutions in society, the health and stability of it can help to community health, so can influence the couple, who make up a family foundation, also had an impact on community health. As the results show that used couples of conflict resolution styles and particularly constructive style, leading to marital commitment and commitment is one of the most important components of a successful marriage, without which a marital relationship will be superficial and will have no direction. In this case, couples will not be able to experience the depth of intimacy and love created in the shadow of loyalty and commitment to the spouse and marriage. By teaching the couples problem solving skills for managing the conflicts and problems, we can increase the level of marital commitment in couples and thereby moved toward family and community health.

Being cross-sectional and population of the study which included only one hospital are among the limitations of this study. Due to these two issues, the results cannot be generalized. Furthermore, since it was a correlational study, explaining the results becomes limited in terms of causal attributions. Another limitation is that like other research that use questionnaire, self-report scales were used in this study that may have provided the possibility of bias in responses.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank all participants who helped the researchers in the accumulation of data.

Contribution

Study design: MSH, KZ

Data collection and analysis: MSH, KZ, FM

Manuscript preparation: MSH, KZ, FM

Conflict of Interest

"The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests."

Funding

The author (s) received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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