

Research Paper

The Relationship Between Social Maturity and Sexual Satisfaction, Subjective Well-being, and Controlling Behaviors in Couples: Emphasizing the Mediating Role of Marital Commitment



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ABSTRACT

Background: Subjective well-being and life satisfaction can help individuals achieve more success in their lives and enjoy better supportive social relationships and higher levels of physical and mental health. The present study aimed to determine the relationship of social maturity with sexual satisfaction, subjective well-being, and controlling behaviors through the mediating role of marital commitment in couples.

Methods: The statistical population in this correlational cross-sectional study included all couples in Tehran City, Iran, in 2019, of which 370 people were selected as the sample using a multi-stage cluster sampling method. The research tools included Rao's social maturity scale (RSMS), the Golombok-Rust inventory of sexual satisfaction (GRIS), the subjective well-being scale (SWS), the controlling behaviors scale (CBS), and the dimensions of commitment inventory (DCI). The obtained data were statistically analyzed by employing structural equation modeling (SEM) in SPSS software, version 23 and LISREL version 8.8.

Results: The results showed a positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and social maturity as well as between subjective well-being and social maturity, both mediated by marital commitment ($P < 0.001$). However, a negative relationship was observed between controlling behaviors and social maturity, mediated by marital commitment ($P < 0.001$).

Conclusion: Based on the results of the present study, the proposed model had a good fit. Therefore, considering the findings of this study helps researchers and therapists design more appropriate therapies.

Keywords: Behavior, Health, Sexual satisfaction, Controlling, Family characteristic

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1. Introduction

The family is a social organization whose relationships between its members are the crucial underpinning component [1]. Hence, it is necessary to analyze the relationships between the family members, on the one hand, and their behaviors within the family framework, on the other hand, to properly understand the structure of the family and the processes governing it. Studying the behaviors of the family members by overlooking the relationships between them or evaluating the relationships between them without considering their behaviors can lead to an unrealistic understanding of the family [2, 3].

Social maturity seems to play a major role in improving couple relationships. Social maturity is the basis of an individual's life which includes adapting to the environmental conditions and making efforts to some extent to fulfill others' expectations, encouraging the spirit of cooperation, dealing with different thoughts and opinions, following teamwork behaviors, taking responsibilities in teamwork, selecting friends, being fond of socializing with others, and respecting the opinions of others [4]. These items themselves improve one's intellectual growth and other aspects of personal development. Social maturity here refers to one's progress in establishing social relationships in a way that allows for harmony with community members and cooperation with them [5, 6]. Ebrahimi [6] reported a significant correlation between emotional maturity and the tendency for emotional divorce in couples.

Another factor that can effectively influence interpersonal relationships is subjective well-being. Those who enjoy higher levels of subjective well-being perceive more pleasant experiences and suffer less from unpleasant emotions [7]. Subjective well-being is associated with a higher quality of life and greater life satisfaction and hope [8]. Subjective well-being refers to efforts made by individuals to achieve perfection to realize their full potential. Accordingly, subjective well-being appears in efforts made to improve one's talents and abilities [9]. Perelli-Harris and Styrk [10] reported a positive and significant relationship between marital commitment and subjective well-being in couples; they also showed that subjective well-being could predict marital commitment in couples. Khasmakhhi and Salahin [11] showed a significant positive relationship between religious orientation and marital satisfaction as well as between social maturity and marital satisfaction. They also found a significant relationship between identity styles and marital satisfaction.

Control is one of the behaviors that make it difficult to establish effective relationships. It is one of the factors that usually appear in closed spaces, such as houses, and cause uncertainty in and disintegration of the family [12]. Control is a phenomenon that destroys healthy family relationships. Other crises are essential because they are the origin of many other problems and crises. Control also destroys family cohesion, bonding, adaptability, and resilience [13]. Based on the main premise of control, when one feels unsatisfied with a relationship, they blame others and factors beyond their control rather than themselves for feeling this way. This disrupts the interaction between spouses. Some disrupted interactions between spouses include negative verbal relationships (criticism), changed relationships, such as unrealistic expectations or lack of relationships, including withdrawal, significant clinical degradation of individuals or family functioning (or observable symptoms of one or both), prevention of decision making by family members, victimization, domination, and dictation of attitudes and needs [14]. The components of controlling behaviors are among the behavioral and emotional components that adversely affect the communication patterns of couples and family members. Some destructive effects of controlling behaviors on relationships between the family members or between the spouses have disrupted intimacy between spouses, family inefficiency and maladjustment in the face of problems, reduced flexibility, and cohesion of the family members, disrupted communication process, lack of common understanding of communication patterns and interpersonal interactions, and reduced resilience [15].

Among the various interactions, commitment is the vital qualitative aspect of a relationship [16]. Marital commitment is defined as the continuous desire of spouses to maintain and continue the marriage. Commitment refers to the nature of a person's dependence on a relationship, in the sense of how secure a person feels in a relationship and to what extent they value maintaining a long-term relationship. Marital commitment includes three dimensions, personal commitment, moral commitment, and structural commitment [17]. Commitment to spouse and marital life is critical for the success of marriage [18]. The three main pillars of a successful marriage are commitment, attraction, and understanding. However, marital commitment is the strongest and most stable predictor of the quality and stability of marital life [19]. High levels of marital commitment are associated with greater expression of love, higher marital adjustment and stability, better problem-solving skills, and marital satisfaction, while low levels

can lead to marital burnout. Since the quality of marital relationships is intertwined with the entire personality of the spouses, it cannot be considered a phenomenon independent of psychosocial factors [20-22].

Sexual desires are among the realities of human life that cannot be ignored because like other human instinctive desires, they exist from birth and change and flourish throughout life [23]. Sexual problems are always among the primary causes of divorce and marital conflicts [24]. Many studies have reported a very strong relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction [25, 26]. Dissatisfaction with a sexual relationship can cause serious problems in marital life, such as hatred of the spouse, annoyance, and low self-confidence. If these issues are exacerbated by tensions and differences, they can deepen the gap between spouses.

The health of the family depends on the health of society. Considering the essential role of couples in the cohesion and personality formation of family members, as well as the relationship between sexual satisfaction, well-being, and controlling behaviors with the social maturity of couples, it is required to conduct wider studies in the field of improving family functioning. It seems that considering the extensive effects that social maturity has on the sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction of couples and consequently on the strength of the family, by using the results of the present study, a great step has been taken to improve the foundation of the family. Therefore, it is essential to consider the importance of sex in the lives of couples, and to pay attention to the relationship between mental well-being, controlling behaviors, and social maturity, so that a crucial step can be taken to improve the marital satisfaction of couples and, as a result, improve family functioning. Based on the presented materials and research background, the present study aimed to determine the relationship of social maturity with sexual satisfaction, subjective well-being, and controlling behaviors through the mediating role of marital commitment in couples.

2. Methods

Design and participants

This correlational study was conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population consisted of all couples living in Tehran City, Iran, in 2020-2021. The inclusion criteria included marriage duration of at least 9 months, residence in Tehran, 20-50 years of age, and written informed consent. The exclusion criteria included affliction with known chronic diseases and failure to complete the questionnaires.

Procedure

To select the participants based on the multi-stage cluster sampling, 5 districts out of the 22 districts in Tehran City, Iran (districts 4, 7, 10, 13, and 18) were selected and then some of the couples visiting the psychological counseling centers in each district who were willing to cooperate in the study were asked to fill out the research questionnaires after they expressed consent to participate in the research. The minimum sample size for studies using SEM should be $5q \leq n \leq 15q$. In this equation, q represents the number of observed variables or the number of questionnaire items and n denotes the sample size. In this study, the sample size was 354 people (five participants per item). After considering the possibility that 12% non-response of the questionnaires, the final sample size increased to 400 people. However, 370 questionnaires were filled out and returned to the research team for analysis and interpretation. To apply the ethical considerations, all participants were asked to provide informed consent. The sampling was carried out after conducting the coordination with the research unit and obtaining the required permits (IR.IAU.TON.REC.1401.019). The data were analyzed confidentially by the researcher.

Measurement tools

Rao's Social Maturity Scale (RSMS): This tool was developed by Greenberger in 1990 to measure the integrated development of the psychosocial structure of individuals. This tool not only discusses the general characteristics and the most common types of public demands but also presents the specific cultural categories that enable individuals to meet these demands. Rao's social maturity scale (RSMS) consists of 90 items, 23 of which are scored positively (4: Strongly agree, 3: Agree, 2: Disagree, 1: Strongly disagree), and the rest of them are scored negatively (1: Strongly agree, 2: Agree, 3: Disagree, and 4: Strongly disagree). This tool measures three components, including personal adequacy (career orientation, self-leadership, and tolerance of psychological pressure), interpersonal adequacy (communication, enlightened trust, and cooperation), and social adequacy (social commitment, social tolerance, and openness to change). The total score on this scale is between 90 and 360. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale was 0.86 [27]. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.83 for this scale.

The golombok-rust inventory of sexual satisfaction (GRISS): This tool was developed by Rust and Golombok in 1985 to measure sexual satisfaction in couples. This self-reporting tool consists of 25 items that are scored using a 7-point scale from 0 to 6. The total score on the ISS ranges between 0 and 150, and higher scores indicate more sexual satisfaction [28]. Amidu et al. [29] reported the reliability of this questionnaire as equal to 0.91 based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In this survey, Cronbach's alpha coefficient on this scale was 0.89.

Subjective well-being scale (SWS): This scale was developed by Keyes and Magyar-Moe in 2003 to measure emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It consists of 45 items, 12 items about emotional well-being, 18 items about psychological well-being, and 15 items about social well-being. The items are scored using a 5-point Likert scale. On this scale, 45 is the minimum score and 225 is the maximum score [30]. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale was 0.80 [31]. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.82.

Controlling behaviors scale (CBS): This scale was developed by Graham-Kevan and Archerin 2005 to evaluate the controlling behaviors of couples. This 32-item questionnaire only addresses the behaviors and does not include physical aggression; it has been designed to measure the controlling behaviors of an individual and couple. The items are scored using a 5-point Likert scale (from 0 to 4) to determine to what extent an individual and his/her spouse commit each of the considered behaviors [32]. Saniei [33] reported the reliability of this questionnaire as equal to 0.90 based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.88 for this scale.

Dimensions of commitment inventory (DCI): This 44-item questionnaire was developed by Adams and Jones in 1997 to measure the three dimensions of personal commitment (attraction-based commitment to the

spouse), moral commitment (commitment to marriage based on the sanctity of the marital relationship), and structural commitment (commitment to the spouse and marriage based on a sense of compulsion or fear of the consequences of divorce). The items are scored using a 5-point scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The total score on this scale ranges between 1 and 172, and higher scores indicate the higher marital commitment of the couple [34]. Ostadabbasi and Safarzadeh [35] reported the reliability of this questionnaire as equal to 0.85 based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In this survey, Cronbach's alpha coefficient on this scale was 0.87.

Statistical analyses

The information obtained from the questionnaires was statistically analyzed using structural equation modeling in SPSS software, version 23 and LISREL version 8.8.

3. Results

The data showed that 53% of the participants were female and 47% male. In terms of age, 32%, 35%, and 33% of the participants were in the age group of 20-30, 31-40-, and 41-50 years, respectively. The data also indicated that 41% of the participants had a high school diploma and 59% had a university degree.

Table 1 presents the Mean±SD, skewness, kurtosis, and correlation of the research variables. As shown in Table 1, the values for the skewness and kurtosis of the variables ranged between -1 and +1. Therefore, the normal distribution of all research variables was confirmed.

Figure 1 shows the values for all the parameters related to the model as well as factor loadings and path coefficients. Considering the standard coefficients and t statistic coefficients, it can be concluded that direct relationships were observed between the variables. The chi-square (χ^2) and root mean square error of approxima-

Table 1. Mean±SD, skewness, kurtosis, and correlation of the research variables

Variables	Mean±SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4	5
Sexual satisfaction	3.26±0.83	0.21	0.40	1				
Subjective well-being	3.42±0.86	-0.14	-0.13	0.81	1			
Controlling behaviors	3.26±0.74	0.03	0.16	-0.83**	-0.80**	1		
Marital commitment	3.53±0.84	-0.43	0.23	0.71**	0.65**	-0.69**	1	
Social maturity	2.97±0.64	-0.53	-0.23	0.76**	0.65**	-0.66**	0.62**	1

** P<0.001



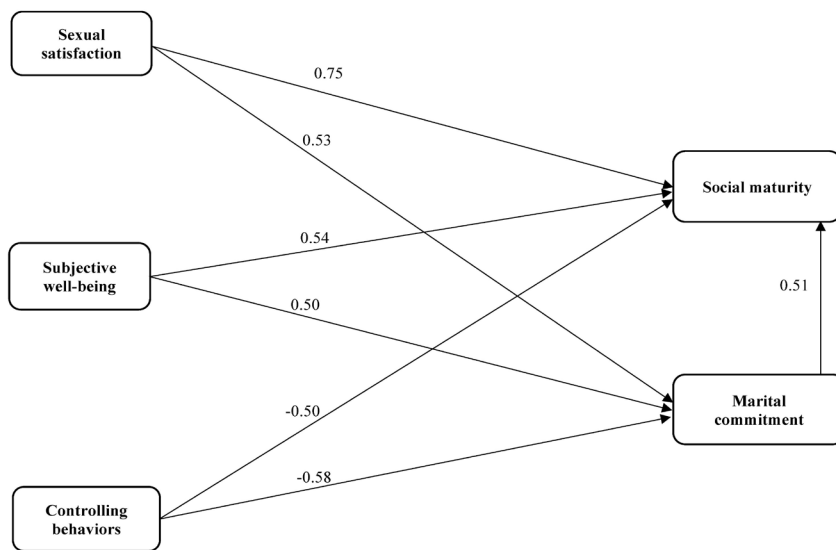


Figure 1. The proposed model of the mediating role of marital commitment in the relationship between social maturity and sexual satisfaction, subjective well-being, and controlling behaviors

tion (RMSEA) indices showed that the research model was well fitted to the data. Table 2 presents the model outputs. The data showed that the indices of the model’s goodness of fit were all at an acceptable fitness level.

The coefficients of direct paths and significance levels confirmed all direct paths (Table 3). According to the re-

sults, a positive and direct relationship was observed between sexual satisfaction with social maturity ($\beta=0.75$, $P=0.001$) and marital commitment ($\beta=0.53$, $P=0.001$). Moreover, a positive and direct relationship was observed between subjective well-being with social maturity ($\beta=0.54$, $P=0.001$) and marital commitment ($\beta=0.50$, $P=0.001$). The relationship between marital commitment

Table 2. Fit indicators of the proposed model

Fit indicators	χ^2	df	(χ^2/df)	CFI	NFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
Proposed model	2.74	1	2.74	0.98	0.97	0.94	0.92	0.071

RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation; CFI: Comparative fit index; NFI: Normed fit index; GFI: Goodness of fit index; AGFI: Adjusted goodness of fit index.

Table 3. Path coefficients of direct relationships between research variables

Paths	Proposed Models		
	β	t	P
Sexual satisfaction → Social maturity	0.75	6.21	0.001
Subjective well-being → Social maturity	0.54	4.49	0.001
Controlling behaviors → Social maturity	-0.50	-4.21	0.001
Sexual satisfaction → Marital commitment	0.53	4.00	0.001
Subjective well-being → Marital commitment	0.50	3.97	0.001
Controlling behaviors → Marital commitment	-0.58	-4.31	0.001
Marital commitment → Social maturity	0.51	3.86	0.001

Table 4. Path coefficients of indirect relationships in the proposed model

Predictor Variables	Mediator Variable	Criterion Variable	Proposed Model	
			β	P
Sexual satisfaction			0.27	0.001
Subjective well-being	Marital commitment	Social maturity	0.26	0.001
Controlling behaviors			-0.30	0.001



and social maturity was positive and significant ($\beta=0.51$, $P=0.001$). Controlling behaviors had a negative and direct relationship with social maturity ($\beta=-0.50$, $P=0.001$) and marital commitment ($\beta=-0.58$, $P=0.001$).

Based on Table 4, the results showed a positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and social maturity as well as between subjective well-being and social maturity, mediated by marital commitment ($P<0.001$). However, a negative relationship was observed between controlling behaviors and social maturity, mediated by marital commitment ($P<0.001$).

4. Discussion

This research was conducted to determine the relationship of social maturity with sexual satisfaction, subjective well-being, and controlling behaviors through the mediating role of marital commitment in couples. The results indicated a positive and direct relationship between sexual satisfaction, social maturity, and marital commitment. Moreover, a positive and direct relationship was observed between subjective well-being with social maturity and marital commitment. The relationship between marital commitment and social maturity was positive and significant. Controlling behaviors had a negative and direct relationship with social maturity and marital commitment. This finding is consistent with the research results of previous studies [16, 27, 35]. Hou et al. [16] reported a relationship between commitment and marital satisfaction in couples. Abdollahi et al. [17] showed a relationship between sexual function and commitment to marital relationships among couples.

Social maturity is the foundation of a human's life. Social maturity here refers to a person's interaction with others and the acceptance of social roles. Social maturity means a person's ability to handle affairs in social situations independently and without asking for help from others [5]. It also includes adapting to environmental conditions or making efforts to fulfill others' expectations, encouraging the spirit of coop-

eration, dealing with different thoughts and opinions, following teamwork behaviors, taking responsibility in teamwork, selecting friends, being fond of socializing with others, and respecting the opinions of others. These items themselves improve a person's intellectual growth and other aspects of personal development. When humans achieve an acceptable level of social maturity, they can then take their stance on the basic issues of life, participate in the movement toward the goodness of mankind, and turn intolerable situations into tolerable ones [4]. A major problem that today's society faces in this regard is insufficient information about sexual issues and wrong attitudes and beliefs about them among families, especially among spouses.

Intimacy between the husband and wife is another effective factor that can promote marital commitment and contribute to marital satisfaction. Couples can experience more satisfying sexual relationships, maintain the attractiveness of the sexual relationships over time, and sustain an atmosphere of commitment, sincerity, and happiness. Sex is of special importance for the establishment and continuation of this committed and intimate relationship. If this atmosphere of intimacy does not exist or is lacking, it destroys the vitality and vivacity of the spouses and negatively affects the quality of marital life and hence the marital commitment [16]. Therefore, it can be concluded that an acceptable level of sexual fulfillment in intimate conditions strengthens marital relations in a successful marriage. In other words, marital commitment and intimacy between spouses are the basic requirements for a successful marriage.

The sexual relationship increases the attachment of spouses to each other because these two variables are related; many couples can achieve sexual satisfaction when they have a more tender relationship and meet each other's attachment needs. In other words, a sexual relationship is a part of the romantic relationship between spouses, and sexual and emotional aspects of intimacy and commitment in romantic relationships are correlated with marital satisfaction [36].

On the other hand, subjective well-being or life satisfaction is the greatest wish and the vital goal of people in life and influences their mental health more than any other factor [37]. Experiencing well-being and satisfaction is the top priority in life, and feeling sad and dissatisfied is often considered a barrier to fulfill duties [38]. Researchers argue that subjective well-being and satisfaction with life can help individuals achieve more success in their lives and enjoy better supportive social relationships and higher levels of physical and mental health. Moreover, positive and negative emotions can trigger different mental mechanisms affecting mental health [39].

Controlling behaviors are also among the factors that influence the degree of commitment, intimacy, social maturity, and the level of psychological well-being in couples. Controlling behaviors are verbal and non-verbal bullying behaviors of a spouse and include the following seven destructive habits, reproaching or criticizing, scolding, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, and paying bribes and tributes to control the other party. Such stereotyped habits are destructive to marital life in the long run and also cause the disintegration and destruction of parental and marital relationships [40].

The study results showed a positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and social maturity, mediated by marital commitment. This finding is consistent with the research results of previous studies [41]. Higher levels of sexual satisfaction can play an effective role in increasing marital commitment. Marital commitment is the crucial factor that can guarantee the sexual satisfaction of couples. Couples who have higher levels of sexual satisfaction exhibit higher levels of marital commitment. Since sexual relationships are among the critical aspects of marital life, it can be stated that satisfactory sexual relationships, as one of the components of intimacy, can help spouses to establish more effective physical and psychological relationships with each other [24]. This can improve the quality of marital life and hence the commitment of the spouses to it.

The results demonstrated a positive relationship between subjective well-being and social maturity, mediated by marital commitment. To explain this finding, it can be stated that subjective well-being refers to an individual's assessment of his life process and direction, which includes their views and attitude toward life satisfaction [37]. Subjective well-being can increase the life satisfaction and self-efficacy of couples in their lives due to its relationship with thinking style. Therefore, subjective well-being and positive emotions can cause

an optimistic orientation and hope for success as well as motivate couples to try harder to achieve a sense of happiness and success in life. Individuals who are less satisfied with their lives may face more social and psychological maturity problems and difficulties [42].

The study results also indicated a negative relationship between controlling behaviors and social maturity, mediated by marital commitment. Couples in today's society face serious and pervasive problems, by establishing romantic and intimate relationships, one of which is controlling behaviors. Some individuals may bother those around them by exhibiting controlling behaviors, such as commanding or controlling others [12]. The most prominent characteristic of individuals with controlling behaviors is that they want all family, occupational, and educational resources for themselves and do not allow others to progress. This is one of the factors indicating the social immaturity of couples in this regard [33]. Since controlling behaviors can reduce marital commitment, it is difficult to live with a spouse who exhibits such behaviors.

5. Conclusion

The model proposed in this study showed acceptable goodness of fit. Considering the extensive effects of social maturity on sexual satisfaction, subjective well-being, controlling behaviors, and the couple's intimacy, the findings of similar studies can be employed to take effective steps to improve the family foundation. Also, considering the findings of this study helps researchers and therapists design more appropriate therapies.

Limitations

The study sample included only couples living in Tehran; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other cities and communities with different cultural, social, and economic conditions. Another limitation was the mere use of questionnaires to collect data, the presence of multiple-meaning words in the questionnaires, and the unfamiliarity with and lack of correct understanding of these words.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the [Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon Branch](#) (Code: IR.IAU.TON.REC.1401.019).

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Authors' contributions

Study concept and design, data collection, data analysis: Hajar Askari Novin; Administrative, technical, and material support, supervision: Hamidreza Vatankhah; Critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content: Javad Khalatbari, and Hamidreza Vatankhah.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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