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Sensation Seeking and Extramarital Relationships: Mediation Role of Marital Frustration

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Abstract: Extramarital relations are one of the most traumatic problems that cause the disintegration of married life, and understanding the factors preventing extramarital relations is of great value in maintaining the stability and quality of life of families. Consequently, present study aimed to investigate the mediating role of marital frustration in the relationship between sensation seeking and extramarital relationships. The present work is quantitative descriptive correlational study that used structural equation modeling. The statistical population included all married men in Tehran in 2022. Participants were 300 qualified people were selected using accessible sampling method. Data was collected via Arnett Inventory of Sensation Seeking (AISS), Niehuis and Bartell Marital Disillusionment Scale, and Whatley's Attitudes Toward Infidelity Scale. The research model and relationships between variables were analyzed using Pearson's correlation test using SPSS version 22 software and Amos software. The results indicated that sensation seeking ($\beta = 0.505$, $P < 0.01$) has a direct and positive effect on marital frustration, has a direct and positive effect on extramarital relationships ($\beta = 0.453$, $P < 0.01$) and has an effect on extramarital relationships ($\beta=0.172$, $P<0.05$), indirectly and through the marital frustration. Furthermore, marital frustration has a direct positive effect on extramarital relationships ($\beta=0.342$, $P<0.01$). According to the results, the emotional based variables such as sensation seeking and marital frustration can affect the attitude towards extramarital relationships. The findings have beneficial implications for therapeutic and educational interventions in extramarital relationships as well.

Keywords: Sensation Seeking, Marital Frustration, Extramarital Relationships

Introduction

Marriage, as one of the most formal and oldest contracts of mutual commitment, provides the basis for the formation of the family institution (Tajbakhsh, 2021). Family, as the most important core of any society and the center of maintaining mental health, is not only a place to meet the emotional, material, developmental and spiritual needs of its members, but also the source of expressing human emotions and the most intimate center of interpersonal relationships and interactions (Mogilski et al., 2019). When the foundations of the formation of the family institution are weak, or when the intimacy and commitment of the couple is damaged after some time, the ground for the formation of extramarital relationships is provided (Valentova et al., 2020). From a traditional point of view, extramarital relations means having sexual relations with a person other than the spouse (Buss, 2018), but today, in addition to sexual relations in particular, having an affair with another person, unusual infatuation and love, emotional relations beyond normal friendship, use of pornography and unconventional communication in virtual spaces are also included in this definition (Frederick & Fales, 2016). Most pathologists, psychologists, sociologists, family counselors and even the families themselves refer to

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extramarital relationships as a growing social problem, which is associated with instability in relationships and a high rate of divorce (Momeni et al., 2018).

Factors involved in marital relationships are different according to individual, social and interpersonal conditions (Sharafuddin & Salehizadeh, 2015). One of the individual factors in people that can be associated with unethical behaviors, including extramarital relationships, is sensation seeking (Ghafoorian et al., 2018). Sensation seeking is a personality trait that is defined by seeking diverse, complex and intense experiences and emotions and by being prepared for physical, social, legal and financial risks due to such experiences (Masson et al., 2020). Sensation seeking is a common word that is used for people's tendency to seek various types of stimulation, from simple touching and looking to showing off from various activities (Colman, 2015). The harmony of husband and wife in this vein should be considered as the reason for the durability of married life, and on the contrary, the inequality of the emotion level of husband and wife is the source of conflicts such as differences in the use of free time, hanging out with friends, carrying out travel plans, in expressing cultural interests and in showing giving feedback in the field of raising children is known to lead to dissatisfaction and collapse of life (Sedighi et al., 2020). In the previous studies have been confirmed the relationship between sensation seeking and marital infidelity (Shafiee & Etemadi, 2018), the role of sensation seeking in married women in predicting the desire to cheat (Rafieinia et al., 2021), the role of emotion regulation as a deterrent factor in extramarital relationships (van Zyl, 2021), the role of sensation seeking in marital infidelity (a qualitative study) (Lalasz & Weigel, 2011) and the role of sensation seeking in sexual infidelity (Aghili & Yazdani, 2021).

Situational and communication factors can have a decisive role on couple interactions and family health. Marital frustration is an unpleasant state that is caused by an unfavorable cycle in a couple's relationship and includes a decrease in attention towards the spouse, emotional alienation and an increase in a kind of feeling of disinterest and triviality towards the spouse (Lavner et al., 2020). With the increase of frustration, it can be expected that the relationship of couples will be in stagnation and the amount of emotional and sexual interactions between them will decrease and it will prepare the ground for extramarital relations. This issue causes symptoms of physical, emotional and mental fatigue and causes couples to not be able to enjoy their marriage, constantly feel physically tired and believe that problems will remain unresolved forever (Sirin & Deniz, 2016). What shows the importance of examining marital frustration in couples more than any issue is the relationship between marital quality in the physical-psychological health of couples and the increasing number of divorces (Sheikh Esmaili et al., 2017). In the earlier studies, the relationship between emotional ataxia and marital burnout of couples applying for divorce (Zarei et al., 2018) and the role of emotional ataxia on marital burnout (Zakeri et al., 2020) have been confirmed in incompatible women. On the other hand, researches talk about the role of marital disappointment in attitudes towards extramarital relationships (Bagheri & Albeheshti, 2020) and the role of marital burnout in predicting marital infidelity (Masonry & Azizi, 2019).

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Extramarital relationships exist today as a hidden social harm in Iranian society, and due to high sensitivity, lack of easy access to people and the religious and customary background that prevails in the society, there is little and insufficient research in this field. Unfortunately, the relevant centers do not accurately present the information about this social problem, so the lack of accurate statistics in the country does not mean that this social problem does not exist, but shows inattention to this hidden social damage (Tajbakhsh, 2021). This issue has caused researches to investigate various dimensions of extramarital relationships, factors affecting them and provide solutions to improve family health (Garbinsky et al., 2020). On the one hand, emotions play a key role in couples' relationships and it is necessary to pay special attention to them, therefore, considering the role of extramarital relationships and the importance of sensation seeking and marital frustration, and the existence of a research gap in the field of the relationship between the aforementioned variables, the current study aimed to investigate the mediating role of marital frustration in the relationship between sensation seeking and extramarital relationships.

Material and Methods

The present research was a descriptive-correlation type using structural equations modeling. The statistical population included all married men in Tehran in 2022. There are different opinions about the sample size in the research related to the structural equation modeling, but everyone agrees that the structural equation modeling is similar to the factor analysis of statistical techniques that can be applied with a large sample and at least 200 people considered sufficient to fit the model (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007); However, due to the fact that a larger sample leads to a better fit of the model and taking into account the possible dropout, a total of 300 qualified people were selected as the research sample using accessible sampling method. The criteria for entering the research included being male, married, living in Tehran, at least 20 and at most 65 years old, informed consent to participate in the research, and having literacy. The exclusion criteria were being single and incompletely completing the questionnaires. The following questionnaires were used to collect information:

Sensation Seeking Questionnaire: This 20-question questionnaire was designed by Arnett (1994), which measures the two subscales of novelty of emotion and intensity of emotion on a 4-point Likert scale from never: a score of one to very much: a score of four, questions 2, 3, 6 , 11, 13 and 17 are scored inversely, the minimum score in this test is 20 and the maximum score is 80. Arnett (1994) confirmed the validity of the construct and reported its internal reliability coefficient in the range of 0.83 to 0.86 and its total retest reliability of 0.78. In Rajabi et al. (2012), content validity was confirmed by professors and reliability was reported by Cronbach's alpha method as 0.67. In the present study, total reliability was obtained using Cronbach's alpha method of 0.71.

Marital Frustration Questionnaire: This 16-question questionnaire was designed by Niehuis et al. (2015). The questions are scored based on a seven-point Likert scale from completely agree (7) to

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completely disagree (1), and the score of the tool is calculated with the total score of the questions. The range of scores is between 16 and 112, and a higher score indicates more marital frustration. The designers reported the validity of this scale using the divergent method as 0.65 and the reliability using the Cronbach's alpha method as 0.73. In Iran, Sayed Alitabar et al. (2016) investigated the psychometric properties of this scale. The factor structure of marital frustration was confirmed using confirmatory factor analysis. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.92 and its retest coefficient was 0.85. In the present study, reliability was obtained using Cronbach's alpha method of 0.74.

Attitude Towards Extramarital Relationships Scale: This 12-question questionnaire was designed by Whatley (2008) and the questions are scored based on a seven-point Likert scale from completely agree (7) to completely disagree (1) and the score of the tool is calculated with the total score of the questions. Questions 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12 are scored in reverse. The range of scores is between 12 and 84, and a higher score indicates a person's positive attitude towards extramarital relationships. Whatley reported the validity of this scale using the divergent method as 0.86 and the reliability using the Cronbach's alpha method as 0.87. The psychometric properties of this scale in Iran were investigated by Habibi et al. (2019), and the factor structure of the scale was confirmed in a first-order factor using confirmatory factor analysis. Also, reliability was obtained by Cronbach's alpha method of 0.71 and by retest method at 0.87. In the present study, reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha method of 0.76.

Due to the spread of the corona virus and the lack of in-person access to the research sample, the sample group was invited to cooperate in the groups available in the virtual space. In order to collect research data, questionnaires were given to married men of Tehran city in virtual space, which included WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram groups. Necessary explanations were provided to the participants regarding the confidentiality of information and their trust was gained to participate in the research. The research model and relationships between variables were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, Pearson correlation using SPSS-22 and Amos-24 software.

Results

In table 1, demographic information related to the members of the study sample, including age, duration of marriage, number of children and education are provided. In Table 2, the correlation coefficients between sensation seeking and marital frustration with extramarital relationships are positive and significant at the alpha level of 0.01 ($P<0.01$). The positivity of the obtained coefficients indicates a direct relationship between sensation seeking and marital frustration with extramarital relationships.

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Table 1. Results related to the demographic information of the research sample

Variable	Range	Frequency	Percentage	Variable	Range	Frequency	Percentage
Age	25-35 y	41	13.5	Marriage age	1-10 y	104	34.3
	36-45 y	138	45.5		11-20	140	46.2
	46-55 y	119	39.3		21-30	53	17.5
	56-65 y	5	1.7		31-40	4	1.3
					41-50	2	0.7
Children number	Without child	40	13.2	Educational level	Under diploma	12	4
	1	119	39.3		Diploma	86	28.4
	2	114	37.6		Bachelor	132	43.6
	3	25	8.3		Master	56	18.5
	4	5	1.7		PhD	17	5.6

Table 2. Statistical description and matrix of correlation coefficients of research variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2
1. Sensation seeking	49.53	6.18	1	
2. Marital frustration	73.38	9.48	0.50**	1
3. Extramarital relationship	37.82	6.33	0.62**	0.57**

** Significant at 0.01

In order to test the research model, path analysis using the maximum likelihood method using Amos software was used. Before using path analysis, univariate outlier data were checked using box plot and multivariate outlier data were checked using Mahalanobis statistic and excluded from the data set. The skewness and kurtosis of the distribution of variable scores were calculated using SPSS software and the results showed that none of the values of skewness and kurtosis were greater than the range of ±1. The normality of the data was checked using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The results showed that the distribution of scores of all variables is normal ($P<0.05$). The assumption of independence of errors was investigated with Durbin-Watson's statistic to calculate the regression equations of the research model, and the obtained value indicates the establishment of this assumption. The assumption of collinearity between variables was investigated using Pearson correlation between pairs of variables. Considering that the correlation of two variables of 0.9 and higher indicates collinearity, this problem was not observed in the data of this research. In addition, tolerance statistics and variance inflation factor were calculated in order to investigate multiple collinearity. The results showed that none of the values of the tolerance statistic are smaller than the permissible limit of 0.1 and none of the values of the variance inflation factor are larger than the permissible limit of 10; therefore, based on the two mentioned indicators, the existence of multiple collinearity was not observed in the data. After examining the assumptions and ensuring that they are established, path analysis was used to evaluate the mediation role of marital frustration in the relationship between sensation seeking and extramarital relationships. The results are presented in Figure 1.

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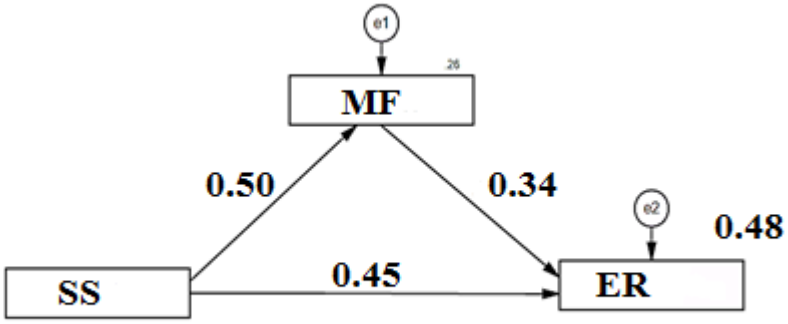

Figure 1. Standard coefficients of the model

Table 3. The goodness of fit indices of the tested model

Fit indices	(2χ/df)	GFI	NFI	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	SRMR
Accepted value	< 5	> 0.90	> 0.90	< 0.08	> 0.90	> 0.90	< 0.08
Obtained value	2.72	0.94	0.93	0.058	0.95	0.95	0.036

In Table 3, the fit indices of the model are presented. The ratio of chi square to the degree of freedom (df/2χ) confirms the fit of the model. This number is in the range between 1 and 5 and means the fit of the model with the data. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is equal to 0.058 and the square root of the residual mean square (SRMR) is equal to 0.036, which is smaller than the criterion value (0.08) and thus confirms the fit of the model. IFI, CFI, GFI, and NFI indices are also greater than the desired criterion (0.9). The obtained coefficients indicate the optimal fit of the model.

Table 4. Direct, indirect, total effects and explained variances of the variables

Path	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Accounted variance
Sensation seeking to marital frustration	0.50	-	0.50	0.25
Sensation seeking to extramarital relationships	0.45	0.17	0.62	0.48
Marital frustration to extramarital relationships	0.34	-	0.34	

Based on the results obtained from Table 4, sensation seeking (β=0.505, P<0.01) has a direct and positive effect on marital frustration. Sensation seeking affects extramarital relationships both directly (β=0.453, P<0.01) and indirectly through the mediation of marital frustration (β=0.172, P<0.01). Marital frustration has a direct positive effect on extramarital relationships as well (β=0.342, P<0.01).

Discussion

Extra-marital relationships are one of the most traumatic problems that cause the disintegration of married life, and understanding the factors preventing extra-marital relationships is of great value in maintaining the stability and quality of life of families; therefore, the aim of the current study was to investigate the mediating role of marital frustration in the relationship between sensation seeking and extramarital relationships. The results showed that sensation seeking has a direct and positive effect on marital frustration, that is, with the increase of sensation seeking, marital frustration increases. In the

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context of the result obtained with the results of previous studies, no research has been conducted directly, but it is in line with the findings of related studies in this field, for example, the results of Motahri et al. (2013) study showed that sensation seeking is related to marital conflict and sensation seeking explains marital conflict in couples as well. The research findings of Mohammad Sharooni et al. (2020) showed that sensation seeking has a significant relationship with marital conflict. Emadi et al. (2020) showed that sensation seeking has a significant direct relationship with women's marital burnout. In the explanation above, it can be said that sensation seeking as one of the personality dimensions of each person has a high correlation with the person's risk-taking power and increases the scope of engaging in behaviors outside the norm. High sensation-seeking people have a high tendency to accept risk and extreme risk-taking in order to gain experiences. Diverse causes them to engage in risky and deviant behaviors such as frustration and extramarital relationships (Weiser et al., 2018). The reason for the tendency of people with high sensation seeking to be disappointed in marriage is related to the mentality of these people who are eager to search for new things, get different emotions, seek diversity and accept danger and risk taking. People who become frustrated in their marriages always complain about the lack of variety in their sex life, and this lack of variety leads to an increase in marital frustration and fatigue from the current joint life.

The results showed that marital frustration has a direct positive effect on extramarital relationships. In other words, it can be said that an increase in marital frustration is associated with an increase in extramarital relationships. The finding is in line with the results of previous studies in this field, for example, Bagheri and Albeheshti (2020) showed that the attitude towards extramarital relationships has a positive and significant relationship with marital frustration; and marital frustration explains changes in attitude towards extramarital relationships. Namani and Najafi (2018) showed that there is a negative and significant relationship between sensation seeking and family cohesion in married women. Also, Niehuis et al. (2015) showed that marital frustration has a significant correlation with extramarital relationships and has the ability to predict extramarital relationships.

In the explanation of the above finding, it can be said that frustration is the result of a decrease in satisfaction and satisfaction in marriage, which happens during married life and gradually decreases the level of commitment of a person in a marital relationship (Namani & Najafi, 2018). In this regard, according to the theory of social exchange, in interpersonal relationships, each person tries to maximize his profit and minimize his costs; as a result, the relationship between people will be maintained only when there is a relationship of cost and benefit for people at a transcendent level. According to the theory of social exchange, the lack of equality of cost and reward for couples leads to inequality in exchange (marriage) and ultimately leads to the breakdown of mutual relations between couples (Bagheri & Albeheshti, 2020). It can also be said that usually at the beginning of the life of intimate and emotional relationships, people have an ideal idea of each other. After marriage, spouses have less motivation to impress their partners and find it difficult to maintain their initial ideal images. Therefore, ideal images give way to more realistic images, and initial intense emotional relationships

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begin to weaken, and finally, the continuation of this situation in some couples causes frustration, extramarital relationships, and divorce (Dadoo & Dabiri, 2019).

The results showed that sensation seeking directly has a positive effect on extramarital relationships. From this finding, it can be concluded that an increase in sensation seeking leads to an increase in extramarital relations. The obtained findings are in line with the results of previous studies in this field, for example, the results of Momeni et al. (2018) showed that the variables of negative affect, emotional dyslexia, and emotional desire can predict marital infidelity. In another study, the results showed that with the increase in sensation seeking, the positive attitude toward marital infidelity increased among married female students (Najafizadeh & Hamzepour Haghighi, 2020). In this regard, Garcia et al. showed in their recent research that the more the personality trait of sensation-seeking in people, the greater the desire to communicate outside the framework of married life (García-Izquierdo et al., 2018). In the explanation of the above finding, it can be said that high sensation seeking in people causes a person's perception of the boredom of married life, these people are always looking for new experiences in life, and this factor, along with the ability to take more risks, the excitement and pleasure of new experiences, causes a greater desire to be involved in marital infidelity (Jahan et al., 2017).

Considering the role that the search for variety plays in the lives of people with high levels of sensation seeking, lack of variety in emotional and sexual relationships, for example, makes them feel tired and uncomfortable, confused and feel lonely, which is associated with the characteristic of experience seeking. Boredom in people with high sensation seeking means dislike of repeated experiences, normal tasks, predictable people and restless reaction when facing such situations is related (Emadi et al., 2020). In fact, the main factor that makes a person prone to cheating is the excitement and pleasure that follows this act and the results of this research confirmed that the intensity of emotion has a significant effect on the desire for extramarital relationships.

In total, the results revealed that the research model has sufficient fit, that is, the results showed that marital frustration has a mediating role in the relationship between sensation seeking and extramarital relationships. In the context of the obtained findings, as far as the researcher has investigated, no study has been conducted, so in explaining this result, it can be said that sensation seeking as a personality trait in the emotional range is a very noticeable issue that has obvious effects and undeniable results on interpersonal relationships and it can clarify some of the issues related to family relationships in the form of emotional relationships between two people who make a marriage contract. It can be expected that people who are in the extreme level of sensation seeking tend to marry people like themselves, and the same tendency should be observed in sensation seekers who are in the mild level of sensation seeking, more precisely, the combination of husband and wife in this trend should be considered as the reason for the durability of their married life, and on the contrary, the inequality of the excitement level of the husband and wife is the source of conflicts such as the difference in the use of free time, hanging out with friends, making travel plans, expressing cultural interests and showing feedback in the field of raising children.

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The current research was faced with limitations. The sample of the current study was selected from among married men in Tehran, so it is necessary to pay attention to the cultural differences in the metropolis of Tehran in making generalizations. Also, due to the limitation of finding the target sample, all people participated regardless of the socio-economic base, age, job level, etc., therefore, it is suggested that future studies be conducted in other cities and samples with different cultures and the role of demographic variables as the modulating variable should be examined in the form of structural equations modeling. According to the results of the research and the clarification of the relationships between the variables of the research, it is suggested to the professionals are active in the field of family therapy in clinical and counseling centers to consider special educational programs to increase the awareness of spouses about the role of sensation seeking and marital frustration in married life.

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