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Attachment Styles and Cognitive Emotion Regulation Strategies in Women with and without Marital Conflict

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Abstract

Today, one of the problems that society faces is the marital conflict and the increase of divorce. Marital conflict is influenced by many variables and issues and this issue has a great adverse impact on family structure and society also has enormous consequences and needs much all-out attention than before. This research also aimed at the same goal. The objective of the present research was to study and compare the cognitive emotion regulation strategies and attachment styles of women with and without marital conflicts. The method of the present study is descriptive and research design is casual-comparative. The statistical population of the present study consisted of all women referring counseling centers in Tehran during four months from January 2016 to April 2016. The sample size included 60 women with marital conflicts and 60 women without marital conflicts that were selected through convenience sampling method. Research data were collected through Sanaei questionnaire for marital conflicts, Garnefski's questionnaire for cognitive emotion adjustment- short form (18 items); and Hazan and Shiever's attachment styles, and were analyzed by multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The analysis of data showed that there was a significant difference between the cognitive emotion adjustment strategies and attachment styles in women with and without marital conflicts. According to the findings which show difference between the cognitive emotion adjustment strategies and attachment styles in women with and without marital conflicts, we can conclude that these variables are directly or indirectly effective in creating or intensifying or continuing the marital conflicts.

Keywords: marital conflicts, cognitive emotion adjustment strategies, attachment styles.

Introduction

When two individuals agree and plan to live with each other's as husband and wife, they have expectations and expectancies which some of them may agree with each other and some may not forever. Disagreement of expectations is reasonable and normal to some extent; but if the disagreement is increased and some expectations of the couple conflict with each other, this means that the conflicts are intensifying and are starting points for fighting against each other.

Marital adjustment refers to a kind of marital relationship in which there are hostile behaviors such as insult, reproach, criticism and physical attack and the husband and wife feel hostility, hate and aggression and each believes that "his/her spouse is an maladjusted and inappropriate person that suffers him/her" (Farahbakhsh, 2004).

Various researches consider different factors effective in the way of interaction and quality of couple's relation with each other and consequently in marital satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Evidence showed that people with emotional skills, i.e., those who know their feelings, direct them well and understand the others' feelings and interact with them effectively, are prominent at any life field, whether in emotional and intimate relations or in understanding the unsaid rules which result in development in organizational policy. Those who have developed their emotional skills well are also happy and efficient in their lives and enjoy mental habits that make them more generative and efficient (Goleman, 2009, quoted from Parsa, 2004). Gottman identified a variety of emotional philosophies in marital therapy that affect on the way of thinking, assessment and responding to the individuals' emotional state. Thus, some couples consider the

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emotion as a burden and consequently they use the way of indifference or even knowing it worthless. Others may consider the emotion as an opportunity to get closer to his/her spouse, know him/her better and help him/her (Gottman, Katz and Hooven, 1997).

Another important factor interfering in how people interact with others, including in the marital relations, is attachment style. Attachment is an inherent and lifelong tendency that its satisfaction makes people comfortable and its dissatisfaction causes people feel stress. When people need for their attachment reference, if s/he is emotionally accessible and responsive, the need is satisfied. Existence of secure attachment puts people in a psychologically comfortable shelter and makes flexible the foundation of character. When people are exposed to fears and threats, their attachment will be intensified and this need outflows in various forms. Each of attachment styles creates active subjective models about the self and others in the mind (Hosseini, 2014). Besharat et al (2015) showed that there was a positive relationship between secure attachment style and positive emotion regulation strategies, and a negative relationship between insecure attachment styles and negative emotion regulation strategies; and avoidant attachment style and anxious-ambivalent attachment style, unlike secure attachment style, have a negative relationship with the positive emotion regulation strategies, and a positive relationship with negative emotion regulation strategies; as well there was a significant relationship between secure and insecure attachment styles and mental divorce; and insecure attachment styles predict the prevalence of mental divorce among couples, while the secure attachment styles are associated with mental divorce with less possibility (Heidari and Ejtemaei Sangari, 2005).

Various research findings such as Jonson (2004, translated by Hossein, 2014), Finney (2003), Collins and Cooper (2002, quoted in Jonson, 2002), Ruge et al. (2013), Corcoran and Mallinkrodt (2000), Misher-Osing (2011), Mohammadi (2001), Kerbi (2007), Dutton and White (2012), Yaryari et al. (2007), Segal (2010), McCracken and Thompson (2009), Jafari Nodoushan et al. (2015), Follad-Chang and Hassan-Nia (2005), Shast-Folladi and Monshaei (2015), and Karimnejad et al. (2015) are consistent.

According to the literature related to marital conflict and the factors affecting it and adverse consequences of marital conflicts in a variety of areas, the researcher decided to perform a research in this area and tried to answer the questions, “are there any significant differences between women’s cognitive emotion regulation strategies and marital conflicts in women with and without marital conflicts? And “are there any significant differences between women’s attachment styles and marital conflicts in women with and without marital conflicts?

Material and Methods

Since the aim of this study is to compare cognitive emotion regulation strategies and attachment styles in women with and without marital conflicts, it is considered as a casual-comparative study.

Study population, sampling method and sample size: The study population consisted of all married women referring to counseling offices and psychological service centers in Tehran during the four months from January 2016 to April 2016. In this study, convenience sampling method was used, so that in order to access the intended sample, i.e., women with and without marital conflict, the researcher referred counseling offices and psychological service centers (private offices, health-care centers) available in Tehran and with the help of counselor and

psychologist of the center gave the questionnaires to the married women who had participated in group sessions or had referred to the center due to marital or family problems. Women without marital conflict were also selected among other married women who had referred to the centers.

Measuring tools

Marital Conflict Questionnaire (MCQ): Marital conflict questionnaire is a 42-item questionnaire to assess conflicts between couples developed by Sanaie in 2000. The questionnaire measures seven dimensions of marital conflict. Collaboration reduction, reduced sex, increased emotional reactions, increased children's protection, reduction of family relationship with the partner's relatives and friends, increased personal relationship with his/her own relatives and separating the financial affairs from each other constitute the seven components of marital conflict questionnaire. In a study by Khazaei (2006), the scores of all components of marital conflict questionnaire were from 0.31 to 0.82 which had significant correlations with the total score of marital conflicts at the significance level of 0.01. Dehghan (….) in a study used Cronbach's alpha to calculate the total reliability of the questionnaire which was 0.71, and for its all components that were 0.73, 0.60, 0.74, 0.81, 0.65, 0.81 and 0.69 for collaboration reduction, reduced sex, increased emotional reactions, increased children's protection, increased personal relationship with his/her own relatives, reduction of family relationship with the partner's relatives and friends, and separating the financial affairs from each other, respectively.

Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire-Persian (CERQ-P) [short form]: The short form cognitive emotion regulation questionnaire was developed by Garnefski et al (2006). This is a multi-dimensional questionnaire and a self-report instrument that has 18 items. The cognitive emotion regulation questionnaire measures nine strategies including self-blame strategy, acceptance, rumination, positive refocusing, and refocus on planning, positive reappraisal, wider perspective, catastrophizing and others-blame. The results of the questionnaire reliability show a high reliability that is acceptable by CERQ. In examining the psychometric properties of the short form of cognitive emotion regulation questionnaire in an Iranian sample by Besharat and Bazazian, the correlation of the subscale scores obtained in the two tests are as follows: Self-blame: 0.70, Acceptance: 0.81, rumination: 0.76, positive refocusing: 0.76, considering less important: 0.78, catastrophizing: 0.72, other-blame: 0.80, refocus on planning: 0.80 and positive reappraisal: 0.78. These coefficients indicate the satisfactory reliability of the cognitive emotion regulation questionnaire through test-retest examination.

Attachment Style Questionnaire: Adult attachment style questionnaire that was developed using materials of Hazan and Sheiver questionnaire and standardized among Tehran University students (Besharat, unpublished) is a 15-item questionnaire which measures the three styles of secure attachment, avoidant attachment and anxious-ambivalent attachment on the 5-point Likert scale (very low, low, medium, high, very high). Items related to avoidance style include items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; Items related to secure style include 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and Items related to anxious-ambivalent style includes items 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. The minimum and maximum scores of the subjects in subscales of the questionnaire were 5 and 25 respectively. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 1480 people (including 860 females and 620 males) for all subjects were calculated as 0.86, 0.84, and 0.85 for female students, and 0.86, 0.83, and 0.84 for male students, respectively, which indicate good consistency of adult attachment scale.

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In this research, to analyze the data at all stages, SPSS software was used. Data analysis was done using descriptive and inferential statistics. In analyzing the data, to measure the percentage, frequency, mean, standard deviation, and classification of demographic information on the sample (duration of marriage, education level, frequency and so forth) and displaying the data on charts and in tables, descriptive statistics was used, and to evaluate and compare variables in both groups and answering to the research hypotheses, the inferential statistics and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used.

Results

The specifications of descriptive variables are as follows. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation of the scores of attachment styles, mindfulness and cognitive emotion regulation for the components for both groups with and without conflicts are presented in Table 1, separately.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics related to the mean and standard deviation of the scores of variables

Variables		Group	No.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Attachment styles	Avoidance	Conflict	60	15.23	3.63	5.00	22.00
		No conflict	60	13.23	3.61	5.00	20.00
	Secure	Conflict	60	10.53	4.69	5.00	21.00
		No conflict	60	15.35	4.21	4.00	25.00
	Anxious-ambivalent	Conflict	60	14.85	3.27	7.00	22.00
		No conflict	60	13.40	3.01	5.00	19.00
Emotion regulation	Self-blame	Conflict	60	5.70	2.20	2.00	10.00
		No conflict	60	5.43	2.25	2.00	10.00
	Acceptance	Conflict	60	6.03	2.17	2.00	10.00
		No conflict	60	5.46	2.06	2.00	10.00
	Rumination	Conflict	60	6.61	2.00	2.00	10.00
		No conflict	60	5.985	2.04	2.00	10.00
	Catastrophizing	Conflict	60	5.58	2.13	2.00	10.00
		No conflict	60	4.76	1.92	2.00	8.00
	Other-blame	Conflict	60	5.51	2.36	2.00	10.00
		No conflict	60	4.55	2.25	2.00	10.00
	Positive refocusing	Conflict	60	5.95	1.97	2.00	10.00
		No conflict	60	6.36	2.35	2.00	12.00
	Refocus on planning	Conflict	60	6.75	1.97	2.00	10.00
		No conflict	60	7.50	2.15	3.00	12.00
	Positive reappraisal	Conflict	60	6.58	2.24	2.00	10.00
		No conflict	60	7.46	2.25	3.00	12.00
	wider perspective	Conflict	60	6.10	1.94	2.00	10.00
		No conflict	60	6.98	1.95	2.00	10.00

The assumptions of variance analysis of the research variables are confirmed and thus we can use multivariate analysis of variance, which is presented below:

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Table 2. The results of multivariate analysis of variance to compare cognitive emotion regulation and attachment styles for groups separately

Effect	Test	Value	F	df of effect	df of error	Sig.
Group	Pillais Trace	0.20	9.78	3	116	0.001
	Wilks Lambda	0.79	9.78	3	116	0.001
	Hotelling effect	0.25	9.78	3	116	0.001
	The largest root	0.25	9.78	3	116	0.001

As can be seen, the significance level of four relevant multivariate tests, i.e., Pillais Trace, Wilks Lambda, Hotelling Effect and the largest root, is equal to 0.001 (P<0.05). Thus, the statistical null hypothesis is rejected and it becomes clear that there is a significant difference between the two groups in the scores for comparison of attachment and cognitive emotion regulation.

First hypothesis: There is a difference between the cognitive emotion regulation strategies in women with marital conflicts and women without marital conflicts. Data related to this hypothesis are examined in Table 3.

Table 3. The test of between-group effects to compare the cognitive emotion regulation scores in the two groups

Variable	Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Emotion regulation	between-group	589.63	1	589.63	4.47	0.03
	within-group	15540.33	118	131.69		
	Total	38598.00	120			

According to the results presented in Table (3), F-value obtained for the examination of cognitive emotion regulation between the two groups is equal to 4.47 to 0.05 which is significant at the level of 0.05. So the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, it is concluded that this component was significantly different between the two groups. Also, to study the components of cognitive emotion regulation in women with and without marital conflicts, a multivariate analysis of variance was used that information is provided in the table below.

Table 4. The results of MANOVA for scores of the components of cognitive emotion regulation in women with and without conflicts

Components of cognitive emotion regulation	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance level
Self-blame	2.13	1	2.13	0.42	0.51
Acceptance	9.63	1	9.63	2.14	0.14
Rumination	12.03	1	12.03	2.92	0.09
Catastrophizing	20.00	1	20.00	4.84	0.03
Other-blame	28.03	1	28.03	5.25	0.02
Positive refocusing	5.20	1	5.20	1.10	0.29
Focus on planning	16.87	1	16.87	3.94	0.04
Positive reappraisal	23.40	1	23.40	4.62	0.03
Wider perspective	23.40	1	23.40	6.16	0.01

According to the data in the table above, it can be said that catastrophizing, other-blame, focus on planning, and positive reappraisal, and wider perspective in women with conflicts are

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significantly different from those of women without conflict, and mean scores of components of focus on planning, positive reappraisal, and wider perspective of women without conflict are higher than those of women with conflicts, and mean scores of catastrophizing and other-blame in women with conflicts are greater than those of women without conflict.

The second hypothesis: There are significant differences between attachment styles among women with and without marital conflicts. Data related to this hypothesis are examined in Table 5.

Table 5. The test of between-group effects to compare the scores of attachment styles in the two groups

Variable	Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Attachment	between-group	336.67	1	336.67	7.72	0.006
	within-group	5143.91	118	43.59		
	Total	238417.00	120			

According to the results presented in Table (5), F-value obtained for the examination of attachment styles separately for groups is equal to 7.72, which is significant at the level of 0.05. So the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, it is concluded that the attachment style was different between the two groups. Also, to study the components of attachment styles in women with and without marital conflicts, a multivariate analysis of variance was used that its information is provided in Table 5.

Table 6. Multivariate analysis of variance scores on attachment styles in women with conflicts and conflict

Components of attachment styles	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Avoidant style	120.00	1	120.00	9.12	0.003
Secure style	696.00	1	686.00	34.94	0.001
Anxious-ambivalent style	63.07	1	63.07	6.36	0.013

According to the information provided in the above table, it can be stated that the avoidant, secure, and anxious-ambivalent attachment styles are different in women with marital conflicts with those of women without marital conflicts; and the mean scores of secure style in women with marital conflict are higher than the mean scores of secure style in women without marital conflict. Also, the mean scores of avoidant style and anxious-ambivalent style in women with marital conflict are higher than those of women without marital conflict.

Discussion

The present research was carried out to study and compare the cognitive emotion regulation strategies and attachment styles of women with and without marital conflicts. The results showed that there was a significant difference between cognitive emotion regulation components in women with marital conflicts and without marital conflicts. The result of this study is consistent with Kerbi (2007) suggesting that "there is a relationship between "cognitive emotion regulation" and "increase of marital satisfaction and decrease of marital conflict". In this regard, Jafari Nodoushan et al (2015) concluded that cognitive emotion regulation and adjustment among divorcees are lower than those of married women with normal marital relations, and it is recommended that the cognitive emotion regulation and adjustment are improved in women on

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the verge of divorce by training them, in order by reducing the divorce, such women less develop personal and social damage. Based on the findings of previous research and this study, management of emotions is like internal and external processes responsible for controlling, evaluating and changing the emotional reaction of the person on the path to achieving his/her goals, and any defect in the regulation of a person's emotions can make vulnerable him/her against psychological problems and interpersonal and marital conflicts. In fact, how to assess couple's cognitive apparatus when faced with adverse events is very important. According to the results of the present paper, women with marital conflicts less use the positive emotion regulation strategies such as focus on planning, reappraisal and wider perspective. Since, the use of positive cognitive emotion regulation strategies causes various positive outcomes such as satisfaction, participation, reducing depression and reducing anxiety in couples, the lack of using the positive emotion regulation strategies is effective in generating marital conflicts.

According to the research findings, it was found that there was difference between attachment styles among women with marital conflicts and without marital conflicts. The results of various researches showed that there was a difference between the attachment styles of women who had marital and relational problems and dissatisfaction of marital life and the attachment styles of women who enjoyed marital satisfaction. In this regard, Collins and Cooper (2002) concluded that people with secure attachment style enjoy higher level of confidence and marital satisfaction and consequently experience a lower level of conflicts. Also, Banes (2004) showed that secure attachment has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction and insecure attachment negatively associated with marital satisfaction. In explaining the results, it can be said that one of the factors affecting marital conflicts is attachment style, so that women with marital conflicts are more likely to have insecure attachment styles and insecure attachment styles negatively affect how women interact with their husbands. On the one hand, the secure attachment style makes women better cope with marital conflicts and securer interactions with their husbands. In fact, the type of attachment styles influences on individuals' spirit and their interaction in interpersonal and marital relationships, and people who have experienced a secure attachment enjoy expectancy and self-confidence, and this affects on the rate of conflict in marital conflicts, and having a secure attachment invokes the interest in having intimate relations and improves the lives of couples. On the other hand, the existence of insecure attachment styles in women directly or indirectly and in interaction with other variables negatively affects on their interactions and relations with their husbands and increases the likelihood of conflict. Of limitations of the present study in terms of population, we can refer to the fact that it covers a certain part of the country and we cannot generalize the results to the whole country, as well as lack of control on many variables potentially intervening in marital conflicts including economic status and social class, and that in this study due to the limited conditions of the researcher, the convenience sampling method was used. Therefore, it is suggested that in future research in the field of marital conflict, the various variables such as economic status and social class to be controlled as well as possible, and the researchers repeat it in different statistical populations, as well as the variables of the present study are examined along with other variables possibly affecting on marital conflicts, and use other research methods.

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