

THE INFLUENCE OF COMMUNICATION, COMPASSION AND RELIGIOSITY ON MARITAL SATISFACTION¹

A INFLUÊNCIA DA COMUNICAÇÃO, COMPAIXÃO E RELIGIOSIDADE NA SATISFAÇÃO CONJUGAL

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Abstract: Communication, compassion and religiosity are of significant predictors that have an impact on marital satisfaction. Satisfaction in marriage is an indicator that shows the level of marriage relationship quality which can be measured by several aspects such as the way of life adjustment between the couple and the lack of household conflict. Thus this study will explore the influence of communication, compassion and religiosity of married partner on marital satisfaction. In this quantitative research, 165 respondents among married couples who work in the public sector in the state of Terengganu, Malaysia were selected by using the purposive sampling method. A modified version of the ENRICH Marriage Scale (EMS) was used to assess marital satisfaction and the questionnaire were distributed using the online survey. The EMS scale is a 15-item scale comprising the Idealistic Distortion (5 items) and Marital Satisfaction scales (10 items). Before the SEM test is tested, prior adjustment tests were made to ensure that the tested indicator actually represents the measured construct. The data were then analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with IBM-SPSS-AMOS program version 21.0. The results of the study found that communication, compassion and religiosity had a significant influence on marital satisfaction.

Keywords: Communication. Compassion. Marriage. Marital Satisfaction. Religiosity.

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que trabalham no setor público no estado de Terengganu, na Malásia, foram selecionados usando o método

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de amostragem intencional. Uma versão modificada da ENRICH Marriage Scale (EMS) foi usada para avaliar a satisfação conjugal e o questionário foi distribuído usando a pesquisa online. A escala EMS é uma escala de 15 itens que compreende as escalas de Distorção Idealista (5 itens) e Satisfação Conjugal (10 itens). Antes do teste SEM ser testado, testes de ajuste prévios foram feitos para garantir que o indicador testado realmente representasse o construto medido. Os dados foram então analisados usando Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) com o programa IBM-SPSS-AMOS versão 21.0. Os resultados do estudo descobriram que comunicação, compaixão e religiosidade tiveram uma influência significativa na satisfação conjugal.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação. Compaixão. Casado. Satisfação Conjugal. Religiosidade.

Introduction

Personal values and virtues normally guide a person's conducts in significant spheres of human life (Kristjan, 2013). A prominent Muslim scholar, al-Ghazali (1982) viewed that one's trait (*shakhsyyah*) includes the internal attributes and external actions either towards God, fellow human beings or with nature as a whole. In this respect, marriage unites two individuals of distinct values and virtues that could impact the overall partner's relationship. Though out the marital life, personality aspects of couples and self-adjustment would mutually interact in their efforts to build compatibility, hopes and future plans, communicate in the face of stress and conflict, as well as managing the household. Fitzpatrick, (1988) defined marital satisfaction as how a married couple evaluates the quality of their marriage. Meanwhile marital satisfaction, according to Rabeno (2018), is a subjective assessment of the husband and wife's marriage that is influenced by all facets of the married life and heightens the sensation of how satisfied the individual is with his marriage. In an Islamic law discourse, marital satisfaction is signified by an ideal family life or home atmosphere filled with *sakinah* (tranquillity), *mawaddah* (love), and *rahmah* (compassion) (Ulwan, 1985; Zubaidah & Zahiri, 2016). In recent years, research across the globe suggest multitude factors as predictors for marital satisfaction. For example, studies find that positivity, forgiveness, and interpersonal communication are related to increased marital quality and positive relationship outcome (Fredrickson, 2009; Dew & Bradford Wilcox, 2013; Maleki et al., 2019). There are various studies that also focus on the relationship between religiosity and the effects in the marriage relationship. Findings of such study also predicts aspects of religiosity with marital satisfaction and commitment. Religiosity which infers to the religious beliefs and religious practice imply a person's tendency and commitment to religious principles. The cultivation of values that is inherent to the religious teaching is likely to influence the marital stability and marital satisfaction (Hünler & Gençöz, 2005; Asamarai et al., 2008). In a study conducted by the Malaysian Ministry of Health, signs of marital conflict begin when there is neglect of responsibilities, lack of communication and

lack of trust in the relationship. Thus, this paper seeks to investigate the impact of religiosity, communication and compassion on marital satisfaction.

1. Literature Review

Marriage is a very powerful and significant tie between two individuals. It is a reciprocal relationship that requires both the satisfaction of personal needs and an emotional connection.

In a research carried out by Maleki et al., (2019), self-compassion that includes kind support for one's shortcomings and incompetency lead to increased satisfaction with marital life. Gilbert (2005) examines a thin line separating compassion and other comparable notions such as sympathy and empathy, whereby the first motivates one to ease the trouble and pain of the other. Numerous studies have shown that compassion includes a variety of components, such as the ability to recognise and comprehend one's own and other people's suffering, to feel empathy and compassion for the person who is suffering, tolerating uncomfortable emotions, and the desire to take action to end suffering (Synder & Lopez, 2002; Strauss et al., 2016). Amato & Booth (1995) in their study found that wives who have egalitarian traits were less satisfied with marriage when they have to consult the husbands on work responsibilities and family affairs which creates discord and stress in the relationship. Satisfactory marital relationships would respectively strengthen couple relationships, reduce depression, empower effective parenting and lead to a satisfying family life (Bradbury et al., 2000; Sacco & Phares, 2001).

Studies also showed that people with more marital stability have higher level of religiousness and consequently reported as having higher level of marital satisfaction (Asamarai et al., 2008; Jafari et al., 2015). Relatively, people who have lower level of religiousness may be less satisfied with their marriage. Religion as a system of beliefs includes manuals for life and values that can affect marital life. In a study by Jafari et al., (2015), the impact of religiosity variables on marital satisfaction of 508 couples in the Pakistan city was measured using the Kansas Marital Satisfaction scale (KMSS), the Religious Practice scale and the Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10). The results of the study showed that marital satisfaction was strengthened by the religious commitment and religious practices which were the variables of religiosity. In a clinical study by O'Laoire (1997), it was concluded that self-esteem is increased by prayer whereby it also helps to decrease anxiety and depression; variables of which have been investigated in association with marital satisfaction (Sacco & Phares, 2001; Taghizadeh & Kalhori, 2015). In a study by Madavifar et al. (2017), a group of married women were chosen to participate in Quran therapy

sessions which included educational package of the Quranic verses and interpretation. According to the study, therapy using the Quran's recitation and its teachings in which Islam regards as one of its divine sources, improves married women's mental health and marital satisfaction. Olson et al. (2015) focused their research on the connections between marital satisfaction and three religious practices; religious homogamy, spousal well-being prayer, and spousal forgiveness. In the study, each religious indicator and marital satisfaction showed a statistically significant linear relationship.

In addition to that, result of many studies also suggest associations between communication and marital satisfaction (Lavner et al., 2016; Ghavibazou et al., 2020). Study conducted by Lavner et al. (2016) revealed that found that satisfied couples communicated more effectively and positively towards each other. In a study by Esere et al. (2011) administered to 600 married adults in Ilorin Metropolis, the findings showed that most of the respondents agree that lack of effective communication hinders marital stability. Studies also found that marital success, which includes marital pleasure and relationship quality, is determined by both the mutual communication and communication styles. (Esere et al., 2011; Jibeen, 2019; T. F. M. Muda et al., 2021).

2. Methodology

The present study will investigate the strength of communication, compassion and religiosity effect on marital satisfaction. This study employs quantitative method is employed, and data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with IBM-SPSS-AMOS program version 21.0. Prior adjustment tests should be performed before running the SEM test to ensure that the tested indicator accurately represents the measured construct (Chik & Abdullah, 2018). There are two analyzes as prerequisites that must be met before the SEM analysis is performed; Exploration Analysis Factor (EFA) and Confirmation Factor Analysis (CFA). In order to confirm that the constructs investigated respectively valid and reliable, the validation factor analysis (CFA) is conducted as a test of measurement model (Hair et al., 2010). The Fitness Indexes is used to see the values of Root Mean Square Error of Approximation ($RMSEA < 0.08$), Comparative Fit Index ($CFI > 0.90$) and Chi Square/Degree of Freedom ($chisq/df < 5.0$) in order to verify the compatibility of the hypothetical models tested.

Using purposive sampling, the study was administered to a group of 165 married respondents who work in the public sector in the state of Terengganu, Malaysia through online survey. A modified version of the ENRICH Marriage Scale by Fowers & Olson (1989) was used

to measure marital satisfaction in this study. The EMS scale contains five (5) items of Idealistic Distortion and ten (10) items of Marital Satisfaction scales. Important marital satisfaction dimensions included by the EMS namely personality traits of the couple, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, intimacy and sexual relationship, parenting, in-laws and friends relationships as well as practicing the practices and values of religious life. Six original items of EMS having two measurable aspects in one item are modified and divided into two items. As for example, the original item read “I am very happy with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together” is divided into two items i.e.: “I am very happy with how we manage our leisure activities” and “I am very happy with the time we spend together”. The items of EMS scale then have been modified into 21 items. Communication was assessed with three items e.g; “My partner always starts a friendly conversation with me”. Compassion was also measured by three items e.g. “My partner always voluntarily helps me with the house chores I usually do, especially when I am unwell or tired”. The constructs for religiosity were assessed with three items that include partner’s religious practice and religious adherence, for example, “My partner always try to improve his religious practices”. The responses were given using five Likert scale options, with 1 denoting strong disagreement and 5 denoting strong agreement.

3. Results

Analysis by using SEM on the effect of communication, compassion and religiosity on marital satisfaction yields the following results:

4.1 The Influence of Communication, Compassion and Religiosity on Marital Satisfaction

Figure 1 below shows the results of the covariance between constructs. The findings showed that the influence of Communication (CO), Compassion (CP) and Religiosity (RE) variables was 93% on Marital Satisfaction (MS) among the study samples.

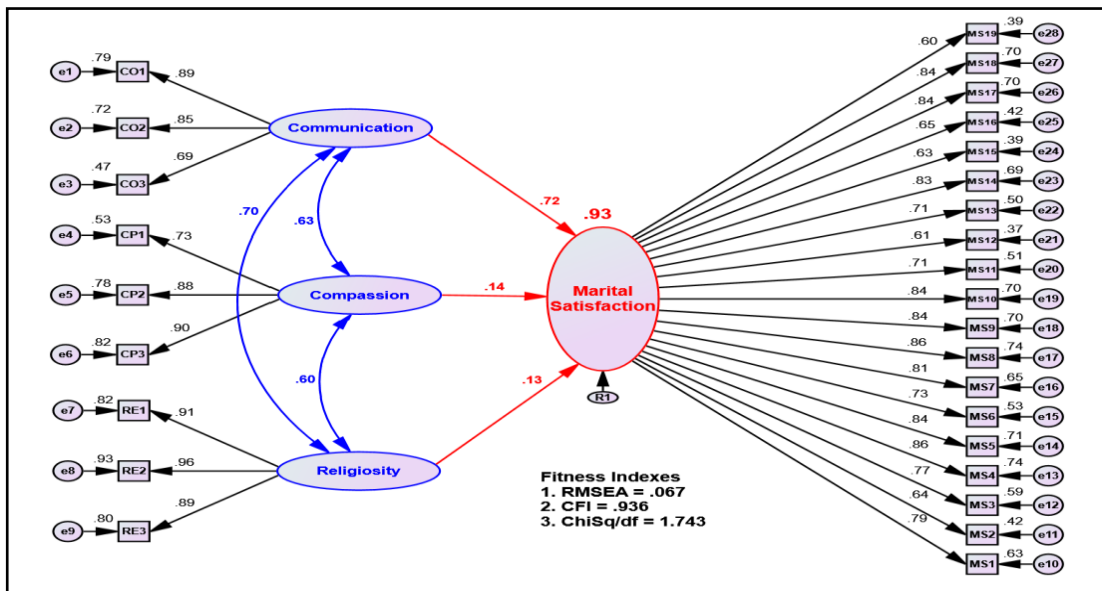


Figure 1: Analysis of Covariance between Constructs (Standardized Estimates)

Figure 2 below shows the results of the covariance between constructs. From the results, the R2 value of the construct of Marital Satisfaction (MS) is 0.93 which indicated that Communication (CO), Compassion (CP) and Religiosity (RE) contributed 93% to Marital Satisfaction (MS). The figure also confirmed that the SEM model is valid with no multi-collinearity problems. The double-headed arrows indicate the correlation value of two independent constructs. It is found that the correlation between Communication (CO) with Compassion (CP) is 0.63, the correlation between Communication (CO) with Religiosity (RE) is 0.70; and the correlation between Compassion (CP) with Religiosity (RE) is 0.60. Thus, from the figure, Communication (CO), Compassion (CP) and Religiosity (RE) has a significant influence on Marital Satisfaction (MS) among the samples studied in this research.

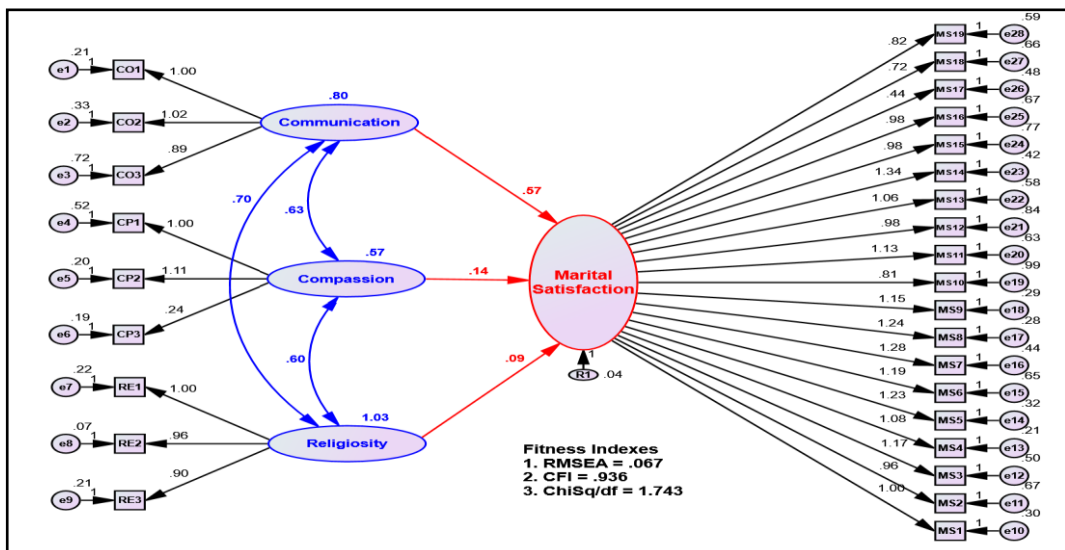


Figure 2: Analysis of Covariance between Constructs (Unstandardized Estimates)

The regression equation for Marital Satisfaction (MS) is as follows: $MS = 0.57CO + 0.14CP + 0.09RE$ ($R^2 = 0.93 = 93\%$). Table 1 shows the results of hypothesis testing of the covariance between constructs.

Table 1: Covariance Values between Constructs

Constructs		Constructs	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Marital_Satisfaction	<--	Communication	0.574	0.139	4.146	***	Significant
Marital_Satisfaction	<--	Compassion	0.135	0.040	4.182	***	Significant
Marital_Satisfaction	<--	Religiosity	0.094	0.044	2.175	0.030	Significant

*** Significant value $p < 0.001$

The SEM findings from Figure 2 conforms the hypothesis testing as in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Hypothesis Test between Constructs

Hypothesis Test	P	Decision
H ₁ : Communication has a significant influence on Marital Satisfaction among the study samples	0.001	Supported
H ₂ : Compassion has a significant influence on Marital Satisfaction among the study samples	0.001	Supported
H ₃ : Religiosity has a significant influence on Marital Satisfaction among the study samples	0.030	Supported

4.2 Analysis of The Influence of Communication on Marital Satisfaction

Based on Table 1, the influence of communication on marital satisfaction is highly significant. The estimated regression value (β) is 0.574 at a significant level of 0.000 (Estimate = 0.574, CR = 4.146, $p < 0.001$ indicate that communication has a significant influence on marital satisfaction. For each unit increase in the Communication (CO) construct, marital satisfaction (MS) increases by 1 unit, the H₁ hypothesis is thus supported by the observed data. In other words, this research also suggests that communication is an important predictor to marital satisfaction.

4.3 Analysis of The Influence of Compassion on Marital Satisfaction

Based on Table 1, the influence of compassion on marital satisfaction is highly significant. The estimated regression value (β) is 0.135 at a significant level of 0.000 (Estimate = 0.135, CR = 4.182, $p < 0.001$ indicate that compassion has a significant influence on marital satisfaction. For

each unit increase in the Compassion (CP) construct, marital satisfaction (MS) increases by 0.135 unit, and the H₂ hypothesis is thus supported by the observed data. In other words, this research also suggests that compassion is an important predictor to marital satisfaction.

4.4 Analysis of The Influence of Religiosity on Marital Satisfaction

Based on Table 1, the influence of religiosity on marital satisfaction is highly significant. The estimated regression value (β) is 0.094 at a significant level of 0.030 (Estimate = 0.094, CR = 2.175, $p < 0.001$ indicate that religiosity has a significant influence on marital satisfaction. For each unit increase in the Religiosity (RE) construct, marital satisfaction (MS) increases by 0.094 unit, and the H₃ hypothesis is thus supported by the observed data. In other words, this research also suggests that religiosity is an important predictor to marital satisfaction.

4. Discussion

It appears that the idea of marital satisfaction aims to capture people's perceptions of contentment in their marriages. High levels of marital satisfaction and spousal connection are regarded as crucial signs of long-term relationships (DeMoss, 2004) and as significant factors that influence people's general wellbeing (Larson & Holman, 1994). Our findings suggest that there is a significant influence of communication, compassion and religiosity of the spouses on the marital satisfaction among public sector workers in Terengganu. The current research finding supported the previous studies on the predictors of marriage satisfaction finds that communication as one of the most contributing factors to satisfaction. It follows that negative communication that has characteristics such as criticizing, defensive, hateful and stonewalling negatively impacted the marital satisfaction. This result is consistent with results of previous studies by Lavner et al., (2016) and Ghavibazou et al., (2020). The principle of communication as enjoined by Islam is to address the mind and the emotions of those around when communicating with them in creating a healthy relationship (Amal Ibrahim, 2016). According to Gottman and Krokoff (1989) usage of various methods of communication can cause marital dissatisfaction. In a study by Hanzal and Segrin (2009), couples' usage of negative communication methods during a disagreement was directly correlated with both their own and their partners' level of marital satisfaction. Thus the couples' ability to have an effective communication, by increasing one's awareness of how one communicates with the spouses; both verbal and nonverbal, may lead to overall marital satisfaction.

The study results further suggest that compassion and religiosity a positive and significant effect to marital satisfaction. It is often believed that marriage offers extra emotional support and closeness. In fact, supporting behaviours are thought to be crucial to help address conflicts and distractions in relationships. Compassion, which refers to providing emotional support, will lead to acknowledging each other's sensitivity and morale as well as having patience when dealing with disagreements. Compassion is also inferred to as thoughtful consciousness of self and others' wearisome and difficult circumstance; it also includes the effort to offer help in good will and empathy (Gilbert, 2005). A healthy relationship between the spouses through showing empathy and offering assistance will ease couples' anxiety, reduce stress and subsequently increase the level of satisfaction in marriage. It is also submitted that partner's willingness to help with housework and chores that may be seemed tedious and trivial to some, has positive influence on marital satisfaction. In a study by Olson et al., (2016) on 1513 respondents, the perceptions of the respondents towards their partner's compassion, humility and positivity were investigated where it was found that there was a significant relationship between the three qualities to marital satisfaction. In relation to marital affairs, Allah says, "...And live with them in kindness" (Quran, 4:19). It is also pertinent to note that the current research confirms the previous findings that associates religiosity with marital satisfaction. The results of this study indicated that one's spiritual connection to God, commitment to religious practice and adherence to the principles are likely to influence the marital satisfaction. Religion supports the value of marriage, which fosters marital commitment among spouses and fosters marital satisfaction and closeness among married couples. Hence, the ability of couples to positively change the marriage relationship through internal adjustment, which is, religiosity that include commitment, forgiveness, and sacrifice can transform challenges and negative situations into opportunities for relationship growth. This helps them maintain and strengthen the marriage. The result supported the study by Jafari et al. (2015), Madavifar et al., (2017), Maleki et al. (2019) and Aman et al. (2019). In another study by Olson et al., (2015) a high level of religiousness was shown to be associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction. Thus, religiosity will create a spiritual atmosphere at home thus increasing marital satisfaction and decreasing marital conflict.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this empirical study confirms the positive and significant influence of three constructs which are; communication, compassion and religiosity on marital satisfaction. These findings confirm extensive research that shows a direct, positive linear link between marriage satisfaction and partner characteristics. Considering the findings of this study, therapists and psychologist that focus on close and interpersonal relationship might benefited in promoting communication skills and spiritual aspect that can be useful for a healthy marriage relationship. Due to the limitation of the present study, future research may benefit with the effect of additional dimensions of positive qualities on marital satisfaction.

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