

## Evaluating the Relationship Between Humor Styles and Marital Satisfaction among Education Ministry Staffs in Sari

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study was to assess the relationship between humor styles and marital satisfaction among employees at Ministry of Education in Sari. This study adopted a descriptive and correlational research approach as its methodology and the statistical population comprised of all employees at Ministry of Education in Sari in 2016. Using Krejcie-Morgan table, the sampling was conducted through stratified random sampling resulting in the selection of 44 subjects as the study sample. The data gathering tool were the humor styles questionnaire by Martin including 25 questions and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) scale consisting of 47 items. The humor styles and marital satisfaction questionnaires reliabilities were estimated through Cronbach's alpha the values of which were 0/79 and 0/86, respectively. To analyze the inferential statistics data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Pearson correlation coefficient using SPSS Software were applied. The findings of the study indicated that there existed a significant relationship between 4 components of humor styles (affiliative style, self-enhancing style, aggressive style and self-defeating style) and marital satisfaction among the employees in Ministry of Education in Sari.

**Key words:** Humor styles, marital satisfaction, correlation, EMS, Iran

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### INTRODUCTION

Marriage is regarded as the most exciting and stressful event for every person. By getting married people confirm that they take a step forward in their growth. Having life satisfaction is one of the prerequisites to peace and human development (Amanelahi *et al.*, 2012). Marital satisfaction is referred to a situation in which the couples, in most situations have happiness, marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is a multidimensional concept that involves various factors inducing satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the relationships. Marital happiness includes a good relationship, emotional satisfaction and intimacy leading to a healthy marital relationship.

Zare believed that humor has a unique role in the couples' intimacy and the emotional responses, happiness, humor and marital satisfaction are regarded as important elements. Marital satisfaction is of principal importance for the stability and durability of life and marital satisfaction in general comprises of (positive feeling, sense of humor, sexual consent (satisfaction), agreement on economic affairs, house making ability and child rearing.

Sense of humor is related to the people's emotional state the creativity of which leads people to express ridiculous comments, stories and plays. A humorous person who consider himself and others in a way which is unique and separated and is able to laugh at himself and

life events, yet remain connected with the people and events (Torrance, 1993). Accordingly, psychologists have emphasized on the role of humor in adaptability, coping with stressors and their relationship with mental health. Unquestionably, humor is a multi dimensional concept that could both improve and threaten the mental health. Sense of humor is a developed defense mechanism that helps people cope with emotional conflicts or external stressors by emphasizing humor and fun aspects of the situations (Kakavand *et al.*, 2010).

The couples' compatibility (adjustment) and marital satisfaction is highly important. Marital adjustment is a situation in which the couples in most cases have feelings of happiness and satisfaction. Researchers believe there is a general consensus that emotional traits and features play an important role in the marital satisfaction positive or negative results. Donnellan, pointing out to various surveys conducted, emphasized that marital satisfaction in particular was affected by couples' personality traits, in fact, the marriage is two characters' bond and each of them starts their common life relationship with a developed background, humor style, a combination of biological factors and experiences.

Marital satisfaction is significantly important for the stability and durability of life and marital satisfaction in general comprises of (positive feeling, sense of humor, sexual consent (satisfaction), agreement on economic affairs, house making ability and child rearing and if the couple increase their marital satisfaction, they can keep

their family from harm and demolition. People without intimate relationships are so isolated and unhappy with the marriage and suffer such condition. They are less likely to associate themselves with the social conditions and do not live long. Ample evidence show that couples for establishing and maintaining warm and friendly relations in today's society have faced severe problems. In addition, couples who have high levels of humor tend to enjoy their everyday life events and experiences because the humorous couples have certain features which would help them tackle the problems and deal with adverse events in a less stressful way and improve their well-being and psychological health.

Salimi *et al.* (2008) in a research shows that humor serves as a double edge razor that could affect couples' relations. Yaghubzadeh conducted a study on the relationship between humor styles with the dimensions of occupational burnout among nurses in Najafabad and came to the conclusion that self-enhancing and self-defeating styles can predict emotional exhaustion and the individual performance were predictable through affiliative, self-defeating and aggressive style and depersonalization was just predictable by affiliative humor style.

Maddah in a study entitled "The Role of Humor and Spiritual Experiences in Resilience and Psychological Well-being" came to the conclusion that humor and spiritual experiences were the predictor of resilience and the three variables of resilience, spiritual experiences and humor were the predictor of psychological well-being in their first year of university entrance.

Kakavand *et al.* (2010) conducted a study on evaluating the humor styles as modulators of relationship between five factors of personality and public health and concluded that there was a significant difference between male and female students in terms of self-enhancing and humor style.

Belaghat in a study on evaluating the relation between happiness and marital satisfaction among families in Zahak concluded that there were significant differences between happiness among female and male respondents and also there was a significant difference between female and male respondents in terms of marital satisfaction.

Zare in a study on evaluating the humor styles and five personality traits in married people indicated that adaptive humor styles (including affiliative and self-enhancing styles) had a significant negative correlation with neuroticism but showed a significant positive correlation with extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness.

Heidari conducted a study on evaluating humor styles, subjective well-being and emotional intelligence among students and reached the conclusion that the affiliative and self-enhancing humor style had a significant correlation with life satisfaction, positive affect and emotional intelligence but negatively correlated with negative affect. Aggressive and self-defeating humor styles were positively correlated with negative affect and negatively correlated with life satisfaction, positive affect and emotional intelligence.

Shfiabadi in a study on evaluating the efficiency of humor style teaching method on hopelessness and social adjustment of depressed students concluded that by applying humor style teaching method, students' hopelessness can be reduced.

Khoshuie conducted a study on evaluating the relationship between humor and mental health among 20-60 year old people in Isfahan and found that there was a significant negative relationship between the dimensions of humor style and mental health.

Viet Kin conducted a study entitled as the comparative analysis of couple's communication program with humor style skills workshop on its impact on effective communication, problem-solving and satisfaction. The results showed that the trained couples participating in "humor skills program" showed a significant positive increase in non-verbal messages.

Burnett in a study on the happiness skills training on marital satisfaction suggested that happiness skills enhancement program and marital distress prevention among newly married couples were useful.

Parrish conducted a research on comparing the premarital humor and a hybrid program on marital behavior. It was found that the combination of these two programs and the humor style had a significant effect on the couples' marital behavior.

In reviewing the literature of humor, it has been shown that only a small portion of the variance in marital satisfaction is predicted by humor. They believe that most of the research regarded humor as a positive concept while the maladaptive aspects of humor style such as mocking and sneering were not paid attention. However, using positive humor causes couples to increase their level of marital satisfaction and keep their family from harm. People without intimate relationships or humor are isolated and unhappy and are less likely to associate themselves with the social conditions and do not live long. Therefore, in the present era, the human life is being faced with many problems one aspect of which is marital relationship. One of the factors influencing these relationships is humor styles. Considering the importance

of family and marital relationship emphasized by psychologists, sociologists and even all religions and that the family is not a place for discontent, this study sought to answer the question of whether there was a relationship between humor styles and marital satisfaction.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study adopted a descriptive and correlational research approach as its methodology and the statistical population consisted of all employees at Ministry of education in Sari in 2016. Using Krejcie-Morgan table, the sampling was conducted through stratified random sampling resulting in the selection of 44 subjects as the study sample. The first data gathering tool was the humor styles questionnaire by Martin *et al.* (2003) including 25 questions on two positive and adaptive affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles and two negative and maladaptive aggressive and self-defeating humor styles. The questionnaire reliability was estimated 0/85 through Cronbach’s alpha.

The other tool was ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) scale consisting of 47 short answer items. The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) scale has 115 closed-ended questions with 12 scales the reliability of which was estimated through Cronbach’s alpha which was about 0/92. To analyze the data, descriptive (including mean and SD) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation) were used. SPSS 18 was used for data analysis.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

To analyze the research data, descriptive and inferential statistical were used. The following Table 1 shows the parameters of humor styles components scores.

According to the results table above, the highest mean score is attributed to the self-defeating style with 36/04 (4/37) and the lowest average scores calculated was related to self-enhancing style with the score of 21/37 (4/98).

**Q1: Is there a relationship between affiliative style and marital satisfaction among employees?** As can be seen in Table 2, the calculated correlation coefficient ( $r = 0/662$  with  $df = 42$  at 99% confidence level ( $\alpha = 0/05$ )) was larger than the t critical ( $t = 0/291$ ) so the null hypothesis is rejected and research hypothesis is confirmed, therefore, we conclude that there is a relationship between affiliative style and marital satisfaction among employees.

Table 1: Index component descriptions of the scores of humor styles

Component	Variables	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Humor styles	Affiliative style	44	35/27	4/72	30	43
	Self-enhancing style	44	27/31	4/98	18	36
	Aggressive style	44	30/34	7/71	18	38
	Self-defeating style	44	36/04	4/37	31	42

Table 2: The correlation between affiliative style and marital satisfaction

Variables	N	R	DF	t-value	$\alpha$
Affiliative style and marital satisfaction	44	0/662	42	0/291	0/05

Table 3: The correlation between self-enhancing style and marital satisfaction

Variables	N	R	DF	t-value	$\alpha$
Self-enhancing style and marital satisfaction	44	0/860	42	0/291	0/05

Table 4: The correlation between aggressive style and marital satisfaction

Variables	N	R	DF	t-value	$\alpha$
Aggressive style and marital satisfaction	44	0/628	42	0/291	0/05

Table 5: The correlation between self-defeating style and marital satisfaction

Variables	N	R	DF	t-value	$\alpha$
Self-defeating style and marital satisfaction	44	0/749	42	0/291	0/05

**Q2: Is there a relationship between self-enhancing style and marital satisfaction among employees?** As it can be observed, the calculated correlation coefficient ( $r = 0/860$  with  $df = 42$  at 99% confidence level ( $\alpha = 0/05$ )) was larger than the t critical ( $t = 0/291$ ), therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and research hypothesis is confirmed, therefore, we conclude that there is a relationship between self-enhancing style and marital satisfaction among employees shown in Table 3.

**Q3: Is there a relationship between aggressive style and marital satisfaction among employees?** As it can be witnessed, the calculated correlation coefficient ( $r = 0/628$  with  $df = 42$  at 99% confidence level ( $\alpha = 0/05$ )) was larger than the t critical ( $t = 0/291$ ), consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed, therefore, we conclude that there is a relationship between aggressive style and marital satisfaction among employees shown in Table 4.

**Q4: Is there a relationship between self-defeating style and marital satisfaction among employees?** Table 5 clearly demonstrate that the calculated correlation coefficient ( $r = 0/628$  with  $df = 42$  at 99% confidence level ( $\alpha = 0/05$ )) was larger than the t critical ( $t = 0/291$ ) as a result, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed, thus, we conclude that there is a relationship between self-defeating style and marital satisfaction among employees.

It must be stated that stressful events in people’s marital life can be changed into a tolerable and pleasant condition using positive humor. The condition and spirit that a person at the time of being angered, anxious or any

other stressful situation keeps his status and faces the situation with a humorous can be called a skill. A skill that must be learned and should be regarded as one of the most important life skills and must be strengthened which would make couples satisfied with their marital life. This study aimed at investigating the relationship between humor styles and marital satisfaction among employees at ministry of education in Sari. The results showed that people with affiliative style are able to share feelings with their wives in fact it can be said that personal relations are stable. People who stick to this affiliative style use humor to facilitate and assist their relations with their spouses which reduces the conflict among couples the result of which would be a high marital satisfaction because when dealing with stressful situations, they express humor and jokes trying to calm their spouses and have a kind of humorous reaction to the situations they encounter. Moreover, it would lead to a successful marital interaction among couples. Thus, according to statistical data, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between affiliative style and marital satisfaction among employees in Sari. The results of the study are consistent with the results of the study by Abedi *et al.* (2012).

Based on the findings of the second question, the self-enhancing style helps couples to accept themselves and keep their wives from being harmed. People who use this style make fun of the strange life situations and view the world quite comically. Focusing on the person rather than their interpersonal interactions, the style helps him overcome marital stressful factors and protects the individual against the absurdity in his marital life. Accordingly, based on the statistical data, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between self-enhancing style and marital satisfaction among employees in Sari being compatible with the results of the studies by Abedi *et al.* (2011).

According to the third question result in aggressive style in which a person tries to develop his self-concept in any way that by mocking others he tries to achieve a sense of self. Although, this style is a useful for a certain period, but frequent use of such style undermines the marital relationship and the person is rejected from family support. Also, the people in their relations with their spouses, regardless of concerns about the negative effects of bad jokes on his wife, tease their spouses and they do not hesitate to say insulting jokes and ruin their marital relations. Thus, according to statistical data, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between aggressive style and marital satisfaction among employees in Sari which is in line with results of the studies by Jamshidian *et al.* (2014) and Abedi *et al.* (2014).

Considering the fourth question on using the self-defeating style, people try to make jokes or fun to attract their wives' attention and approval even if they have to belittle themselves. That is, they consider such behavior as a mechanism to hide the underlying negative feelings or avoid undesirable situations. In fact, it can be said that people at the expense of their humiliation make their family laugh. As a result, their acceptability in the family decreases and their wives will take the lead. People who have this style of humor consider their gains as negligible compared others. Such people humiliate themselves by telling a joke or satire in order to entertain other people. It is considered a maladaptive style of humor serving as a process of conflict avoidance. In other words, these people refuse to serve in the face of stressful stimuli and subsequently deny their negative emotions and do not have a good married life.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, according to statistical data, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between self-defeating style and marital satisfaction which is compatible with the results of the studies by Kakavand *et al.* (2010).

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