

Relationship Between Parenting Myths and Marital Satisfaction in Parents of Primary Schoolers

Mehrangiz Shoa Kazemi*

Associate professor, Department of Social economics, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran

Seyyede Narjes Omrani

M.A in women's studies, Department of Women's Studies, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran

Zahra Mirzaei

M.A in women's studies, Department of Women's Studies, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran

Narges Khatoon Sabuti

Ma school of counselor, kharazmi University, Tehra, iran

Abstract

Purpose: Parents' myths about parenting are among factors affecting couples' marital satisfaction. The present study aimed to investigate the association of parenting myths with marital satisfaction. **Method:** Parents of primary school students (3rd–5th grade) in Tehran, Iran, (n = 150) were recruited for the study via convenience sampling. Research tools included Seidi's Parenting Myths Scale (2016) With 50 questions ($\alpha = .94$) and ENRICH marital satisfaction scale(1998) with 47 questions. Multiple regression was used for data analysis. **Results:** significant association was found between parenting myths and marital satisfaction. In the best model, parent-child identity ($\beta = -0.37$), excessively calm parenting ($\beta = 0.35$), overemphasis on educational achievement ($\beta = 0.28$), separation of work and personal life ($\beta = 0.22$), and efficacy ($\beta = 0.21$) were best predictors of marital satisfaction. **Conclusion:** parenting myths affect marital satisfaction in different cultural contexts, which illustrates the role of culture and belief in each region on the satisfaction of families in that region.

Keywords: Parenting myths; Marital satisfaction; Parents of primary schoolers.



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1. Introduction

Parenting and parent's interaction with their children significantly affects marital satisfaction and family life. Parent's love for their children and perfectionism in parenting will lead parents to enforce their own myths on their children. These myths are subjective ideals regarding parenting and being a perfect parent that contribute significantly to shaping their ideas of raising kids and dealing with them (Schafer (2007), Myths are widely held beliefs that are not based on the facts (Larson, 1988). Molavi considers a myth as simply an idea without contemplation, and ancient Greeks viewed myths as the stories of things that could not happen in reality. Scholars have conceptualized the myths around love and marriage and studied their effects on the quality of couples' relationship (Larson, 1988; Lazarus, 2001; Sprecher and Felmlee, 1992). It seems quite possible that parenting myths influence parents' behaviors and emotions, just as the myths around marriage and love can affect people's marriage and family life (Lazarus, 2001). Parenting myths provide the parents with an ideal parent profile that is far from the facts of the real world.

The most important aspect of a married people's emotional and social life is their relationship with their spouses (Ellis, 1995). Marital satisfaction refers to a feeling of happiness and satisfaction when a couple attend to all aspects of their marital life. Kaplan and Maddux state that marital satisfaction is a personal experience in marriage that spouses perceive based on delight and joy in marital relationship (Kaplan and Maddux, 2002). They believe that this satisfaction depends on a people's expectations, needs, and desires in their marriage. Marital satisfaction refers to the degree of satisfaction between couples, which is the satisfaction they perceive in their relationship (Lawrence *et al.*, 2008). Transition to parenthood is a psychologically and physically sensitive stage in the life of couples. During this transition, couple relationship undergoes various changes. Studies on the effect of having a child on marital satisfaction shows both positive and negative effects (Broman, 2000; Doss *et al.*, 2009; Lawrence *et al.*, 2008; Orathinka *et al.*, 2007). The Transition to parenthood, the crisis of taking on the new role, and the internalized parenting myths and unrealistic expectations to be a perfect parent and raise a perfect child, all may contribute to degrees of conflict and tension in the couple's relationship and undermine marital satisfaction. These expectations are common to a great portion of the society. Family, media, and culture are the major contributors to the ideal parent and ideal child myths (Yerizon and Subhan, 2018).

Parenting myths and marital satisfaction has been studied mainly in Western societies. However, research on parenting myths and their effect on family relationship and marital satisfaction in Iran is limited. A review of domestic literature revealed that no study has addressed the influence of parenting myths on parents in Iranian

cultural context. In foreign literature, several works have approached the topic of parenting myths (Pantley, 2007; Schafer, 2007), although in a counseling context and not through a systematic quantitative or qualitative research. In the present study, given the precedence of cognition over behavior, parental myths and marital satisfaction have been treated as independent and independent variables, respectively. Therefore, the research question was how parenting myths affect marital satisfaction.

2. Method

This was a correlational descriptive study. Research population included the parents of primary school students (3rd–5th grade: 10–12 years old) in Educational region 1, Tehran, in school year 2016–17. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, and the inclusion criterion was being a parent for at least 10 years.

2.1. Sample Demographics

The study sample included 150 parents aged 30–50 who had been married for 10–30 years. The families had between 1 and 4 children and the parent's education varied from diploma to doctoral level. Parents were self-employed, employee, or retired, and the monthly income, as an indicator of socio-economic class, ranged from \$600 to \$2500.

2.2. Measurement Tools

1. Parenting myths scale: This instrument was developed from the results of the doctoral thesis of Seidi (2015). After extracting and verifying the themes related to parenting myths, a scale was developed and validated for assessment of these myths. The scale has 50 items and 17 subscales. The items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.94 and for individual subscales varied from 0.58 for 0.78. Content validity of the scale was verified by 11 experts, and its face validity was assessed by 13 of the participants. After administration of the questionnaire to 119 participants, a correlation coefficient of 0.55 was obtained for the total score of the scale. The instrument's construct validity was assessed using factorial analysis methods, which indicated a high psychometric quality and the resulting model had desirable goodness-of-fit indices (table 1).

2. ENRICH marital satisfaction scale: the short version of the questionnaire, including 72 items and 11 subscales rated on a 5-point Likert scale, was used for assessment of marital satisfaction. The subscale of the questionnaire and their items are

subscale	items
personality issues	2, 4, 12, 22, 40
idealistic distortion	1, 3
marital satisfaction	4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
financial management	8, 15, 16, 25, 34
conflict resolution	7, 14, 24, 33, 42
communication	6, 13, 23, 32, 41
sexual relationship	18, 27, 36, 44
leisure activities	9, 17, 26, 35, 43
equalitarian roles	5, 12
family and friends	11, 19, 28, 37
and religious orientation	5, 21, 30, 39, 45, 47

The scores are calculated based on the T scale, with a mean and SD of 50 and 10, respectively, and the maximum obtainable score is 325. Scores <20 indicate strong dissatisfaction, while >70 suggest a great marital satisfaction. Correlation coefficients ranged from .41 to .6 and for Family Satisfaction Scale, and from .32 to .41 for the Satisfaction with Life Scale, which indicates its construct validity. All subscales of this questionnaire discriminate satisfied and dissatisfied couples, which implies its criterion validity.

3. Results

3.1. Marital Satisfaction in Significantly Associated With Parenting Myths

This hypothesis was addressed through stepwise multiple regression analysis. First, a correlational analysis was conducted for parental myths and marital satisfaction. The results are presented in Table 2.

Results showed that only tirelessness, separation of work and personal life, efficacy, overemphasis on educational achievement, and being overprotective were significantly correlated with marital satisfaction. Then, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed to test the hypothesis. Parenting myths and marital satisfaction were entered in the regression equation as predictor and criterion variables, respectively. Small coefficients indicate nonlinearity. The results of linearity assessments for independent variables are presented in Table 3. Results do not support linearity. The regression model summary is presented in Table 4.

The best prediction model, i.e. no. 5, the multiple correlation coefficient was .63, which indicated a rather strong positive relation between predictors and criterion variable. Determination coefficient was .4, meaning that 40% of variance in marital satisfaction is explained by the predictors. Indices of analysis shows that the results of regression

analysis are significant and there is linear relationship between variables ($P < .001$). Goodness-of-fit indices show that the model desirably fits the data and that the variances explained by the model are not due to chance. It also shows that the predictors contribute 99% to the prediction of marital satisfaction.

Regression coefficients in Table 5 show that in the best model (i.e. no. 5) the predictors of the criterion variable in order of contribution are afterbirth (parent-child identity) ($\beta = -0.37$), excessively calm parenting ($\beta = 0.35$), overemphasis on educational achievement ($\beta = 0.28$), separation of work and personal life ($\beta = 0.22$), and efficacy ($\beta = 0.21$).

4. Discussion

Our results pointed to a significant relationship between parenting myths and marital satisfaction. Most parents believe that above-mentioned factors are characteristics of an ideal parent and that having these characteristics will help them raise successful children. The effect of tirelessness in marital satisfaction has not been studied in the context of Iranian culture in general, and Tehran in particular, although the association of happiness and marital satisfaction has been established (Geiss *et al.*, 1983). Various studies regarding the relation of self-control in the family to marital satisfaction suggest a significant association. The belief that a good parent does not get weary and is always vibrant and energetic is but a myth, for there are a lot of ups and downs in life (Bailey *et al.*, 2007). The stress that parents undergo due to unrealistic expectations leads to distress and anxiety and overshadows every aspect of their lives. The inability to deal with undermine their physical and mental health, even marital life (Fenell, 1993). Stoeber states that parents' unrealistic expectations, concerns about their mistakes, and uncertainty regarding their actions will negatively affect marital satisfaction (Steuber, 2005). This idea has been supported by other studies (Melrose, 2011; Park *et al.*, 2010; Stoeber and Yang, 2010; Stöeber and Stöeber, 2009). One point, however, worth mentioning is that the parents' exhaustion and anger is not habitual enough to enforce its negative effect on marital satisfaction; in fact, what is important is mental health, which contribute to self-control and welfare and consequently marital satisfaction. A mentally healthy parent can cope with his or her distresses and develop compatibility. Parents' love of their children will make them overcome their weariness and irritation upon facing their children at home, and this leads to increased efficiency and satisfaction in family.

According to our findings, the more parents are able to manage their family and work life and separate their issues, the more marital satisfaction will grow. It is difficult, if not impossible, to manage the mental conditions that are the result of interactions in the workplace and not take the work issues home. Researchers consider separation of personal and work life impossible and believe that people should strive to solve their problems in both home and workplace, and not create tensions that will be taken home (Blacher *et al.*, 2013). Research shows that inconsistency between tasks assumed inside and outside home causes stress and anxiety, which in turn can undermine mental well-being and decrease marital satisfaction. Mental health, as a strong facilitator, can decrease work stress and its effects (Shahraki and Mardani, 2010). Numerous studies support the association of work stress and anxiety with marital satisfaction (Aycan and Eskin, 2005; Hammer *et al.*, 2005; Jackson and Schuler, 2003; Jakson, 2001; Kouzma and Kennedy, 2004).

The efficacy myth was another positive predictor of marital satisfaction. In line with this finding, some studies have showed child's efficacy and attention to as a contributor to increased marital satisfaction. High degrees of marital satisfaction have been reported with the addition of children to the family. Parents take on the new role of parenting and enter a pleasant new mental and social milieu, experience an increasing sense of motivation and determination, exhibit more cooperation and collaboration in their daily interactions, and develop different path and purpose in their life, with the final result of achieving higher quality of life and satisfaction. Familialism, which is subordinate to efficacy, refers to putting priority to family, spending time with family, having warm interactions with members of family. Indeed, it provides the family members with a protective umbrella against different situations and boosts their capabilities in different ways (Carr, 2006). Most parents subordinate their values to behavior of their children. When a couple get preoccupied with their children, they will barely have enough time to cherish their relationship. Couples who, knowingly or unknowingly, annoy each other in any way undermine their marital intimacy. Marital intimacy tends to decline over time as parents put more emphasis on interaction with children (Amponsah, 2010).

Other themes that had significant predictive relationship with marital satisfaction were overemphasis on educational achievement and being overprotective. Parents will be successful in parenting they are unanimous, control and oversee their children, protect and support them while respecting their independence, and put more emphasis on conduct than speech. The result will be children who will achieve success in various social and financial aspects of life, leading family to well-being and success (Nargiso *et al.*, 2012). Parent-child interactions contribute significantly to normal development of family members. Advocacy and protection by parents will help develop desired social behaviors (academic achievement) and create safe attachment and tendency to fulfill expectations of significant others. In other word, development of safe attachment through protective parenting styles leads to greater self-respect and healthy conduct and behavior. Authoritative parents have intimate relation with their children. They respect them and receive mutual respect. They control and oversee their children's conduct and behavior (Wolfe and McIsaac, 2011). Parents will experience higher level of marital satisfaction in a healthy family if they have healthy children as well. A number of studies have indicated that excessive protection and tending may undermine children's self-confidence and self-worth in education as well as other aspects of life (Domar and Kelly, 2008). Overprotection and excessive tending will make children depend on their parents and fail to face life challenges by themselves (Doss *et al.*, 2009). and overemphasis on educational achievement will lead to neglecting their talents in other aspects of life (Schafer, 2007).

The other finding of the study was that the parent-child identity myth was a negative predictor of marital satisfaction. Parenting myths develop long before being a parent. The belief that children are reflection of their parents and mother's mood during pregnancy will affect the conduct and behavior of the child in the future, has led couples to postpone conception until such time that there is no issue and challenge in their life. This leads to self-reproach in parents (Domar and Kelly, 2008). A study showed that the stress of being a mother and raising children results in depression and dissatisfaction. The mother's depression and dissatisfaction, in turn, affects the father and undermines marital satisfaction (Lawrence *et al.*, 2008). Research shows that marital satisfaction decreases because of shift in role and lack of freedom following childbirth (Twenge *et al.*, 2003). Mikucka analyzed life satisfaction dynamics in Russian cultural context and showed that parental life satisfaction increased during first birth but was stronger at second birth, thereby indicating positive effect of parenthood on life satisfaction in long term (Mikucka, 2016).

5. Conclusion

Marriage is one of the strongest human relationships. The quality of this relationship is constantly taken into consideration by couples and is potentially important for the whole experience of their family life. Satisfaction with marriage and the satisfaction of marital life in the quality, durability and survival of the marriage is irrefutable. When the couple are satisfied with their marriage, the family has a good strength and they can be safe from the damage. Therefore, the significance of the problem requires that, in addition to important factors such as personality traits, lifestyle, cognitive factors, and other factors that are important in other objective factors such as ethnic and religious homogeneity and demographic factors (age of marriage, age interval, Choosing a spouse, etc.) to provide a healthy and constructive environment with the right choice in terms of pleasure and paternal satisfaction, and the foundation of future generations, community development, the promotion of culture and the transfer of values in it. One of the factors that affects marital satisfaction is parenting Myth. This research also emphasized the role of parenting myth and marital satisfaction. The important point in the current study is that the analysis of family system without considering the sociocultural context will be an incomplete endeavor. Therefore, considering sociocultural components is of the utmost importance in family research. Since sociocultural values and principles affect the way in which family processes work, the analysis of the family within its particular context seems necessary (Huston, 2000).

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Table-1. Alpha coefficients for factors

	Factors	Items	α
1	Faultlessness	12, 34	.67
2	Tirelessness	1, 4, 13, 24	.78
3	Separation of work and personal life	3, 25, 35	.6
4	Excessively calm parenting	2, 14	.7
5	Giving up marriage	5, 16, 26, 36	.75
6	Efficacy	8, 23, 37, 40	.62
7	pre-marriage–educational	28	.58
8	pre-marriage–behavioral	17, 38	.6
9	Pregnancy	7, 18, 29, 39	.69
10	Afterbirth (parent-child identity)	5, 6, 19, 30	.6
11	Obsessive problem solving	20, 32, 41	.67
12	Overemphasis on educational achievement	42	.69
13	Being overprotective	9, 21, 47, 48, 50	.64
14	Limitless friendship with child	10, 43, 46, 49	.71
15	Sufficient affection	11, 33, 44	.65
16	Refusal to punish	22, 45	.7
17	Relationship restoration by child birth	31	.75
Total		50	.94

Table-2. Correlation between parenting myths and marital satisfaction

Variable	N	R	P
Faultlessness	104	.06	.58
Tirelessness	107	.21	.03
Separation of work and personal life	106	.29	.003
Excessively calm parenting	106	.06	.54
Giving up marriage	105	.06	.54
Efficacy	107	.23	.02
pre-marriage—educational	97	.02	.85
pre-marriage—behavioral	107	-.18	.06
pregnancy	106	-.06	.56
Afterbirth (parent-child identity)	93	-.03	.75
Obsessive problem solving	99	.08	.45
Overemphasis on educational achievement	107	.21	.03
Being overprotective	107	.21	.03
Limitless friendship with child	107	-.09	.38
Sufficient affection	107	.01	.89
Refusal to punish	107	.09	.35

Table-3. Results of testing for linearity of independent variables in marital satisfaction

Criterion variable	Predictors	Tolerance	VIF
Marital satisfaction	Separation of work and personal life	.72	1.4
	Excessively calm parenting	.96	1.04
	Afterbirth (parent-child identity)	.88	1.14
	Overemphasis on educational achievement	.75	1.34
	Efficacy	.77	1.3

Table-4. Models summary and analysis of variance of marital satisfaction by parenting myths

Model	Predictors	R	R ²	R ² adjusted	F	P
1	Separation of work and personal life	.37	.14	.13	12.4	.001
2	Separation of work and personal life	.47	.22	.2	11.14	.0001
	Excessively calm parenting					
3	Separation of work and personal life	.54	.29	.26	10.44	.0001
	Excessively calm parenting					
	Afterbirth (parent-child identity)					
4	Separation of work and personal life	.6	.36	.33	10.87	.0001
	Excessively calm parenting					
	Overemphasis on educational achievement					
	Afterbirth (parent-child identity)					
5	Separation of work and personal life	.63	.4	.36	9.9	.0001
	Excessively calm parenting					
	Overemphasis on educational achievement					
	Afterbirth (parent-child identity)					
	Efficacy					

Table-5. Coefficients of stepwise regression for marital satisfaction by parenting myths

Model	predictors	Nonstandard coefficients		β	t	P
		B	Standard error			
1	Separation of work and personal life	13.22	3.75	.37	3.52	.001
2	Separation of work and personal life	13.77	3.59	.38	3.84	.0001
	Excessively calm parenting	11.96	4.06	.3	2.95	.004
3	Separation of work and personal life	14.99	3.48	.42	4.3	.0001
	Excessively calm parenting	13.79	3.97	.34	3.48	.001
	Afterbirth (parent-child identity)	-14.2	5.27	-.27	-2.7	.01
4	Separation of work and personal life	10.36	3.66	.29	2.83	.01
	Excessively calm parenting	14.7	3.79	.36	3.88	.0001
	Overemphasis on educational achievement	8.79	2.94	.31	2.99	.004
	Afterbirth (parent-child identity)	-17.8	5.16	-.33	-3.45	.001
5	Separation of work and personal life	7.8	3.8	.22	2.05	.04
	Excessively calm parenting	14.35	3.71	.35	3.86	.0001
	Overemphasis on educational achievement	7.96	2.91	.28	2.74	.01
	Afterbirth (parent-child identity)	-19.66	5.13	-.37	-3.83	.0001
	Efficacy	7.06	3.45	.21	2.05	.04