

SPOUSAL APPROVAL OF RECREATION AS AN INDICATOR OF MARRIAGE QUALITY AND STABILITY

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to determine if and to what extent equal point of view of spouses regarding recreation can be seen as a significant indicator of the quality and stability of marital relationship in our society. For this purpose 436 women, who live in marriage or non-marital cohabitation, aged 19- 64, were tested. The differences among the tested women who share the same attitude about recreation with their spouses and those who do not, were tested by discriminatory analysis regarding the following: different demographic variables, general satisfaction with the marriage and marital relationship, different aspects of the quality of the marital relationship, style of affectional bond, marital locus of control, differences in judgement of personal and spouse's values, presence of stressful events, strategies for overcoming the stress, stability of the marriage and intention to seek professional psychological help. Statistically significant discriminatory factor ($r_c=0.54$; $p= 0.00$) was obtained which is interpreted as harmonious in contrast to the conflict prone marital relationship. The main conclusion of the research is that the spousal approval of recreation represents a good indicator of general harmony in a marital relationship.

Keywords: recreation, marital relationships, marriage satisfaction, divorce potential

Introduction

Although studies concerning marital satisfaction and factors which influence it started in the 1930s (Terman et al., 1938), marriage and marital relationships attracted attention of sociologists and psychologists just after the great social and economic changes had appeared, in developed countries of the West and in North America, which caused powerful clash of the individualistic and traditional values, and which started to seriously endanger the creation and preservation of family.

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In the USA, as well as in almost all present day members of European Union, the number of registered marriages has started to decline continuously since the 1960s, and at the same time the divorce rate has started to increase (Eurostat, 2010). This is why since 1974 impressive number of scientific research papers regarding marital and family relationships has been published. More than 15000 articles with the topic of marriage have been registered over the last 15 years in index base ISI Web of Knowledge.

While majority of these studies focused on determining the factors which influence the quality of marital relationships, a smaller number of studies was aimed at establishing how the quality of marital relationship affects spouses and their offspring. Different studies examined a great number of variables which were considered as potential determinants of marital stability. Most of these studies were aimed at discovering the possible causes or at least correlates of divorce, as the final result of marital instability.

Over the past decades in our society the number of registered marriages has fallen, the quality of marital relationships has decreased, the number of divorces has increased and birth rate has decreased, which has subsequently caused that the nation itself is getting older. However, for the last two decades, the attention of our researchers in the field of marital relationships has been mostly focused on children and teenagers, as the most vulnerable categories of the population, whereas the older family members were studied mostly in relation to their parental and/or professional roles.

Psychological studies which deal with marriage stability and quality of marital relationships are quite rare in our country. Such studies were conducted on clinical population and they studied the connection between marital dysfunctionality and individual psychopathology (Draganić-Gajić et al., 2005; Dragišić Labaš, 2008; Mićanović-Cvejić et al., 2009; Šakotić Kurbalija et al., 2010). Even rarer are the studies which deal with psychological characteristics of marital relationship in non-clinical population, for example like studies which deal with the characteristics and functionality of marital relationships in families in the Province of Vojvodina (Mihčić, 2007; Jarmaz, 2010). The results of these studies show certain unexpected findings: for example the tested parents of adolescents in the Province of Vojvodina express high general satisfaction with the quality of their marriages (when asked to give general mark 82.2 % of the people interviewed said that the quality of their marriages was very good and even excellent), while functionality of their marriages was estimated to be under average (Mihčić, 2007). In addition to this, it is quite interesting that among the examined married couples in Vojvodina, there was no sign of the Traditional marriage couple, even though our society is still considered to be highly traditional (Jarmaz, 2010).

The studies of marital relationships in non-clinical population also indicate that as the number of years spent in marriage increases, estimated quality of affectional - sexual compatibility decreases for male subjects, whereas female subjects express a decline in marriage satisfaction (measured by DAS scale) and estimated level of cohesion in marriage (Mihčić, 2007).

Similarly to the results of numerous studies conducted in foreign countries and cultures, the results of research in our society show that perception of the quality of marital relationships is generally worse from female point of view comparing to the perception of their partners, and the differences are significant especially when estimating the partners' coordination about everyday responsibilities and their emotional-sexual compatibility (Jarmaz, 2010).

Considering features culturally and historically specific to our country, present day social and economic crisis as well as absence of psychological studies of connection between marital stability and quality of marital relationships in non-clinical population in our society, it is important to determine to what extent it is possible to apply the results of existing studies

and theoretical models of marital functions based on different societies and cultures on our own society.

Bearing in mind that numerous studies showed that marriage satisfaction diminishes with the birth of the child, especially according to female perception (Ade-Rider & Braubacker, 1983; Chester, 1982; Belsky, Spanier & Rovine, 1983; Belsky, Lang & Rovine, 1985; Belsky & Pensky, 1988), that motherhood has much stronger impact on women's lives comparing to the impact paternity has on men's lives (Nomaguchi & Milkie 2003), that the women's marriage satisfaction proved to be more important to the marital stability than men's marriage satisfaction (Heaton & Blake, 1999, Obradovic & Cudina-Obradovic, 2000), that women's perception of the quality of marital relationships proved to be the first and the most important factor which leads to divorce or which helps preventing divorce (Cross & Madson, 1997; Karney & Bradbury, 1995), the main subject of this research was perception of different aspects of quality of marital relationships and divorce potential for women – those who had child or children of early age and for women from childless marriages.

The aim of this research is to answer the question if, and to what extent, it is possible to consider the spousal approval regarding recreation as a significant indicator of the quality and stability of marriage in our society.

Method

In order to determine the significance of spousal approval regarding recreation as an indicator of quality and stability of marital relationship, and considering the above mentioned findings and especially the finding that women-mothers show the least marriage satisfaction while the children are in early childhood, the research was conducted on women who have child/children up to the age of 7 and the control group consisted of women from childless marriages, in order to control to some extent the effects of parental roles on marital stability and perception of the quality of marital relationship.

The sample included 436 women, aged 19-64, who live in registered or non registered marriage (138 women in childless marriages and 298 had young child/children).

Self-descriptive techniques such as questionnaires and estimating scales were used in order to record the examined variables. Most of the instruments were taken from earlier studies, since they showed satisfactory psychometric characteristics so far; one smaller segment of research battery was constructed especially for this research.

Discriminatory variable in this research is the estimate given by the women about spousal approval regarding recreation.

The differences between the group of women who share the same attitude towards recreation with their spouses and the group of women who do not were determined by the following sets of variables:

1. *Socio-demographic variables* (age, age difference between spouses, education, difference regarding educational level between spouses, total monthly income of the household, relationship length, cohabitation length, marriage length, number of children, the oldest and the youngest child)
2. *Marital satisfaction* (general evaluation of marital satisfaction was determined on a 7-grade scale, and the answers were from 1- very dissatisfied to 7- very satisfied)

3. *Quality of marital relationship* was examined Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS-7, Spanier, 1976), which consists of 4 subscales:
 - "consensus" (spouses' agreement about issues which are important for every day functioning);
 - "marriage satisfaction" (spousal trust, frequency of conflicts, degree of tension, impression of mutual intolerance and personal attitude towards the future of the marriage);
 - "affectional-sexual compatibility" (degree of compatibility of spouses regarding expressing emotions and sexual relationship); and
 - "cohesion" (degree of closeness and quality of communication between partners).
4. *Divorce potential* (Booth, Johnson and Edwards, 1983).
5. *Intention to seek professional psychological help* (the instrument designed for the purpose of this research includes experience from the past and present and intention to seek professional psychological help in the future as well as the reasons why the examined women have or do not have intention to seek professional psychological help.)
6. *Style of affectional bond between partners* was examined by using a shortened version of Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory (Brennan, Clark and Shaver, 1998)
7. *Marital locus of control (impression of effectiveness in resolving marital conflicts)*
8. Marital locus of control was examined by applying "Perceived efficacy in solving intimate conflict scale" (Fincham and Bradbury, 1987).
9. Differences in estimating personal and partner's values (the Mate Value Inventory, Kirsner, Figueredo and Jacobs, 2003).
10. Presence of stressful events
11. Presence of stressful events was examined by using a modified and shortened version of SLE scale (Survey of Life Events, Bradbury, 1990)
12. Strategies for overcoming stress (Brief COPE Scale, Carver, 1997).
13. The differences between the women who share the same attitude towards recreation with their spouses and those who do not were examined by discriminatory analysis in relation to all above mentioned variables.

Results

Although the differences between the women who have children and the women who do not have children, on the level of the groups, were statistically significant, they did not prove to be reliable indicators of marital stability and quality of marital relationships. Therefore the research presents only statistic analysis which comprised the whole sample of women (436) and it did not include the results of the analyses conducted on the sub samples, in order to avoid redundancy.

Spousal approval of recreation and marriage quality

The statistically significant discriminatory factor was obtained, which explains the differences in characteristics of marital relationships between the women who share the same attitude towards recreation with their spouses and those who do not.

Table 1 shows the most important results of this discriminatory analysis.

Table 1

Results of discriminatory analysis

λ	% variances	Cumulative % variance	r_c	Wilks's λ	χ^2	df	p
.419(a)	100.0	100.0	.544	.704	145.020	40	.000

λ – typical root of discriminatory factor ; % variance – variance percentage explained by discriminatory factor; r_c – coefficient of canonical correlation; Wilks's λ – measure of differences of centroid groups; χ^2 – test for significance of Wilks's λ ; df – number of degrees of freedom; p – level of significance of discriminatory function.

Table 2 shows variables for which the correlation with isolated discriminatory factor was estimated to be higher than $r = 0,2$.

Table 2

Extract from the matrix of structure of discriminatory factor

Variable	Correlation
DAS Consensus	.790
DAS Cohesion	.506
DAS Marriage satisfaction	.474
Subjective estimate of marriage satisfaction	.467
Efficiency in resolving marital conflicts	.321
DAS Affectional -sexual compatibility	.315
Impression of woman's superiority	-.285
ECR Avoiding	-.259
total monthly income of household	.228
Sum of negative stress	-.226
Divorce potential	-.217

As it can be seen from the table 2, bipolar discriminatory dimension was obtained whose positive pole determines general good relationship between the partners, and also high cohesion of the couple, stronger marriage satisfaction (measured both with the subjective estimate and objective criteria), efficiency in resolving marital conflicts, more noticeable affectionate expressiveness between spouses and a little higher total monthly income of the household.

On the other hand, negative pole of the discriminatory factor is determined, first of all, by the impression of the women of their higher importance comparing to their partners, then on the basis of the absence of affectional bond, larger number of total negative stressful events and higher divorce potential.

Based on its structure, discriminatory dimension can be either harmonious or conflict-prone marital relationship.

As it can be seen from Figure 1, the examined women who share the same attitude towards recreation with their spouses on average have higher results according to the discriminatory factor comparing to the women who do not share the same attitude about recreation with their spouses. In other words, women who share the same attitude towards recreation with their spouses show harmonious marital relationship, whereas women who do not share the attitude show more conflict-prone marital relationship.

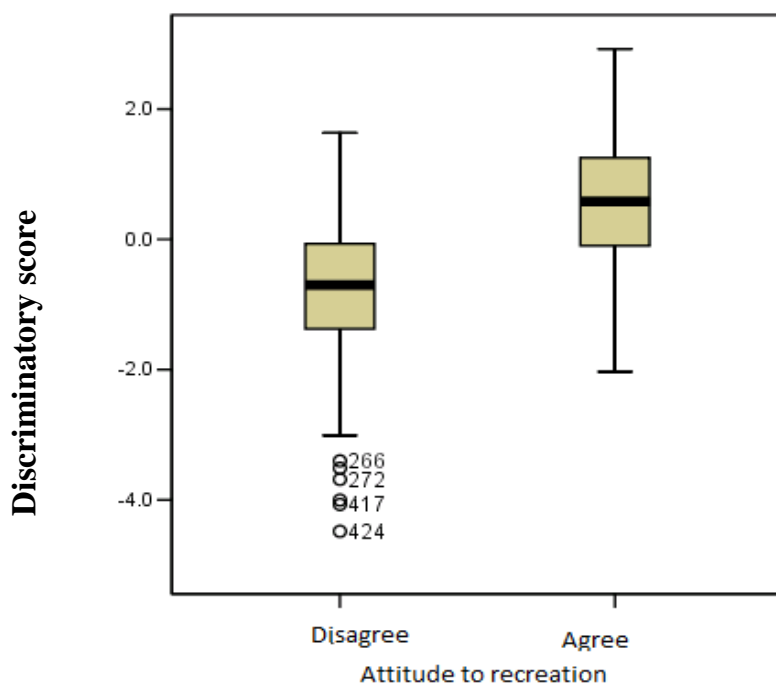


Figure 1 Distribution of women tested based on discriminatory factor

Centroids of the groups are -0,789 for the group of women who do not share the same attitude toward recreation with their spouses and 0,529 for the group of women who do.

Table 3 shows indicators of classification of the women based on the results of the discriminatory analysis, where it is clear that 75,5% of the women were classified correctly.

Table 3

Results of the classification of the women tested based on discriminatory factor

		Attitudes towards recreation	Estimated group affiliation		
			Disagree	Agree	Sum
Original	frequency	Disagree	129	46	175
		Agree	61	200	261
	%	Disagree	73.7	26.3	100.0
		Agree	23.4	76.6	100.0

Discussion

It must not be forgotten that the research which is shown in this work is a correlation research and that the results obtained show only connection among the examined variables, and they do not show their cause-effect relationship.

It is a certainly significant result that the spousal approval of recreation is in high correlation with the general degree of good relationship between the spouses and mutual agreement concerning questions which are of high importance for everyday functioning, such as relationship with parents and relatives, relationship with friends, attitude to religion, amount of time spent together, making mutual decisions, keeping the households finances, house chores, interests and leisure activities, beliefs, aims and accomplishments etc.; and the degree of the spousal approval of recreation can be considered as a good indicator of their general agreement.

Bearing in mind the finding that different spousal attitudes to recreation are connected to woman's feeling of being superior, her incapability to achieve closeness with her partner, higher number of negative stressful events and higher divorce potential, we can assume that there is a circular cause and effect relationship among these variables. Different attitudes of the spouses towards the recreation are probably at the same time cause and effect of the conflict-prone marital relationship. Inconsistent attitudes of spouses regarding the recreation certainly cannot lead to their close relationship, but on the contrary, to their drifting apart. In the same way, since the marital stability is a dynamic process, we can assume that the change from similar to different attitudes toward recreation represents a signal of the beginning of mutual drifting apart and, if those different attitudes continue to exist, the difference leads to further drifting apart, that is to higher divorce potential.

The main conclusion of the research is that the spousal approval of recreation represents a good indicator of general harmony in marital relationships.

One should not forget the fact that this research examined only mutual *approval* of the spouses regarding recreation and that the research did not gather data about whether their mutual attitude towards recreation is positive or negative, nor about how much time the

partners spent on recreation per week. In subsequent studies it would be important to gather this kind of data and to examine contribution of recreation to the quality of marital relationships. In addition to examining how women balance various roles – professional, parental and marital roles, it is important to determine how much recreation can help them in efficient balancing these roles and in prevention of the syndrome of burning down.

From the point of view of utilitarian moral, which is characteristic of “modern” individualistic system of values more and more present in our society, marriage union should provide partners and their children with the sense of happiness and joy, if it is functional / right one; long term dissatisfaction and frustration are considered to be clear indicators of wrong, dysfunctional marital relationship. In this sense *satisfactory – stabile* marital relationship is the only desirable and healthy option (marital relationship of lower divorce potential and general marriage satisfaction followed by perception of high quality marriage, according to all parameters).

However, the problem is that many people who seek *satisfactory – stabile* marital relationship and who aspire to it forget that marriage cannot exist without conflicts, various problems within and outside the family (sometimes smaller and sometimes bigger), uncertainty, personal frustrations and all other sorts of unpleasant feelings. That is why it is important for partners to learn how to overcome conflicts in a constructive manner, instead of ignoring or avoiding them.

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