



Print ISSN: 2251-6654
Online ISSN: 2588-3542



Journal of Family Counseling and Psychotherapy

Vol. 11, No. 2 (32), 2022

20.1001.1.22516654.1400.11.2.1.1

Phenomenology of Marital Attraction among Iranian Spouses: A Qualitative Study

Received: 2020-12-26

Accepted: 2021-11-09

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Abstract

Background: Attraction in the marital relationship is necessary to create interest between spouses. Different individuals and groups probably perceive and interpret marital attraction in different ways. **Objective:** The objective of this research was the phenomenology of marital attraction among Iranian spouses using a qualitative. **Method:** The participants were 17 Iranian women and men who had the experience of common-life with their spouses by purposive sampling with maximum variation (2016-2017). The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews by asking open questions about the research goals. The data were analyzed through Conventional Qualitative Content Analysis. **Findings:** According to the findings, the participants perceive marital attraction as a lovable and pleasant marital relationship. Marital attraction involves two main categories: attraction of spouse (including appearance, emotional, behavioral, intellectual, moral, and social attraction) and attraction of marital relationship (including consistency, joy, satisfaction, tranquility, and happiness). **Conclusion:** Studying the concept of marital attraction in other cultural contexts, providing an instrument for its assessment, using marital attraction conceptual dimensions in marital training, evaluating, counseling, and therapy, were suggested.

Key words: *phenomenology, marital attractiveness, spouses, Iranian spouses, qualitative research*



Introduction

Attraction in the marital relationship is necessary to create interest between spouses. Marital attraction plays a very important role in the quality and continuity of marital relationships (Vangelisti, 2004), which makes couples have more eager to be together, to be more intellectual, emotional, and to have more behavioral alliances with each other (Sternberg, 1986; Karandashev & Fata, 2014). In addition, Marital attraction plays an important role in the prediction of marital satisfaction (Shults, 2013; Yeh, Lee, Yu, Wu, Chang & Huang, 2020). Marital attraction includes sexual and non-sexual dimensions (Tobore, 2020). Although the literature on marital attraction emphasizes more on the sexual dimension (Karandashev & Fata, 2014), different individuals and groups probably perceive and interpret it in different ways. On the other hand, marital attraction as well as marriage attraction between couples does not remain constant over time (Enach, 2013). Due to the importance of marital attraction in the marriage quality, the probability of changing it during different stages of life, its diverse construct in the different contexts, and the lack of adequate research on marital attraction in the Iranian population, the objective of this study was to identify conceptual dimensions of marital attraction through its conceptual meaning and dimensions among Iranian spouses, using a qualitative approach. The question of the research was: How is marital attraction perceived by Iranian spouses.

Methodology

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach and the phenomenographical method. The participants were 17 Iranian men (3) and women (14). The sample was selected using a purposeful sampling method with the maximum variation. The criteria for the sample size were the saturation of the data. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and were analyzed through Conventional Qualitative Content Analysis using MAXQDA₁₀ software. The criteria of Guba and Lincoln (1994) were considered to improve the trustworthiness of the findings: credibility (improving researcher credibility, researchers triangulation), transferability (studying a multi-case), dependability (variety of participants), and conformability (checking with peers and supervisors).



Results and discussion

The participants that had enough experience of common life with their spouses were selected from education level (high school 6, undergraduate 6, complementary 5), economical class: low c. 3, medium c. 11, high c. 3, the length of common life period: below five 4, six to fourteen 6, plus fifteen 7, and the age difference between the spouses: below five 4, six to nine 6, plus ten 7. Through the analysis of the data, 324 codes about marital attraction were categorized in 25 conceptual indicators, 11 subcategories, and 2 categories. The first dimension is the attraction of the spouse. The conceptual structure of the attraction of the spouse was shown in Table 1.

Table 1 the conceptual structure of the attraction of the spouse

<u>The attraction of the spouse</u>	
<u>Subcategories</u>	<u>Conceptual indicators</u>
Appearance A.	attractive face
	attractive clothing
Emotional A.	positive affection
	negative affection, absence
Behavioral A.	attractive lifestyle
	communication style
Intellectual A.	sexual behavior
	being like-minded
Moral A.	optimism
	honesty
Social A.	rectitude
	pride on the spouse
	familial attractions
	cultural symmetry

According to the participant's point of view, it can be said that spouses evaluate each other in the different components: appearance, emotional, behavioral, intellectual, moral, and social dimensions and it can yield positive or negative affect.

The second dimension is the attraction of the marital relationship. The conceptual structure of the attraction of the marital relationship was shown in Table 2.



Table 2 The conceptual structure of the attraction of the marital relationship

<u>The attraction of the marital relationship</u>	
Subcategories	Conceptual indicators
Consistency	continuance of relationship continuance of attachment
Satisfaction	mental satisfaction sexual satisfaction
Joy	the joy of being loved the joy of thinking about spouses sexual pleasure
Tranquility	feeling of confidence feeling of Security
Happiness	feeling of gladness feeling of felicity

According to the participant's point of view, it can be said that couples evaluate the relationship in the different components: Consistency, satisfaction, joy, Tranquility, and happiness. The attractive relationship was important for the participants as a dimension of marital attraction, too. It shows the importance of the relationship dynamics besides the individual dimension.

From the point of view of the participants, two dimensions are important in the conceptualization of marital attraction, these consist of multiple components. These findings conform to Isanejad & Hooshmand (2020), Abdollah, Hadi & Abdou, (2020), and others. It seems that all components are interrelated in explaining marital attraction.

Conclusion

The objective of this research was to describe the conceptual dimensions of marital attraction through its conceptual meaning among Iranian spouses using a qualitative approach. According to the findings, the participants perceive marital attraction as the loveable and pleasant marital relationship that involves two main categories: the attraction to the spouse (including appearance, emotional, behavioral, intellectual, moral, and social attraction) and the attraction of marital relationship (including consistency, joy, satisfaction, tranquility, and happiness). The main limitation of this study was the refusal of some men to participate in the study. Studying the concepts of marital attraction in other cultural contexts and other mutual relationships, providing an instrument for its assessment, was suggested. In addition, it is suggested to use the conceptual dimensions of marital



attraction in marital training, evaluation, counseling, and therapy in the context of Iranian couples.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Dr. Maryam Ordibeheshti, Dr. Hadi Hasankhani, Dr. Sadegh Maleki Avarsin, and Mr. Mohammad Alizadeh, all of the participants in this study, and the managers and personnel of the Yavaran Roshd counseling center in Tabriz.

Authors' contributions

The first author's contribution to this research was the collection and the analysis of the data and writing the article, the second and the third authors were the advisors of the dissertation, and the fourth author was the research advisor.

Funding

The study was conducted as a Ph.D. dissertation at the Kharazmi University of Tehran. The permit number of the research was H/63/488.

Availability of data and materials

The voices and handwritings of the interviews are accessible by the corresponding author.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The interviewer assured the participants that all contents of the interviews were confidential and all of them participated in the study after oral satisfaction.

Consent for publication

The researchers are satisfied publication of this article.

Competing interests

This research is not in conflict with other personal or organizational interests. The first author of the article is a faculty member at Azarbaijan Shahid Madani University in Tabriz, the second, third, and fourth authors are faculty members of Tehran Kharazmi University.



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