



Attitudes Toward Love, Emotional Maturity, and Early Maladaptive Schemas as Predictors of Spouse Selection in People on the Verge of Marriage

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Received 2020 October 03; Revised 2021 June 11; Accepted 2021 November 05.

Abstract

Background: In every culture, different criteria are considered for choosing a spouse, and some psychological factors predict spouse selection in people on the verge of marriage.

Objectives: This study aimed to investigate the role of attitudes toward love, emotional maturity, and early maladaptive schemas in predicting spouse selection in a sample of people on the verge of marriage.

Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted from June to September 2018. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, participants were selected using the convenience sampling method and evaluated by the Love Attitudes Scale, the Emotional Maturity Scale, the Young Early Maladaptive Schema Scale-short form, and the preference criteria of spouse selection inventory.

Results: The results showed that Pragma love, lack of independence, and disconnection and rejection were the best predictors of the spouse selection process ($R^2 = 0.50$; $F = 11.62$; $P < 0.001$). Also, Eros love, lack of independence, and impaired autonomy and performance were the best predictors of content spouse selection ($R^2 = 0.66$; $F = 15.38$; $P < 0.001$).

Conclusions: Young people have criteria for selecting a spouse. Pragma love, which is rational love, predicts the spouse selection process, and if content spouse selection is used, Eros love, which is hedonic, is the best predictor. Thus, all family therapists and counselors need to know about this criterion in each area they work.

Keywords: Attitudes Toward Love, Emotional Maturity, Maladaptive Schemas, Spouse Selection

1. Background

Spouse selection is considered the most critical stage in the family life cycle, and it has some criteria such as physical characteristics, socio-economic status, education level, and family status (1-4). The criteria for spouse selection can be either intrinsic (physical attractiveness) or extrinsic (being intelligent) (5). The theory of homogamy postulates that like attracts like, and every individual usually selects someone who is most similar to them concerning age, religion, nationality, and education (6, 7). Some research has reported that despite changes in the rules for marriage with people of color over time, white women still tend to marry their peers (8, 9). A study conducted on students in Nigeria found that having a similar education level was an essential criterion for spouse selection in 67% of participants (10). Based on complementary needs theory, dominant people match with domineering, and those with a leader characteristic select submissive spouses. The biological perspective focuses on physical attractiveness and

childbearing for spouse selection (11-13). Men and women whose criteria for selecting a spouse is to have a healthy and attractive spouse tend to choose spouses with more attractive faces. For example, the larger body woman in traditional African societies or having a moon face in China is desirable (14, 15). In the south of Iran, Refahi et al. (16) examined criteria for spouse selection among 543 couples with at least five years of marriage and divided them into two categories of content criteria, including age, education level, occupation, income level, mental and physical health, religion, and physical attractiveness, and process criteria involving skills in organizing the family system, communication skills, coping skills, problem-solving skills, and flexibility. The results showed that men observed the content criteria for marriage.

One of the psychological structures related to spouse selection is attitudes toward love. Love includes cognitive components (unread thoughts and constant mental preoccupation with the loved one) and behavioral compo-

nents (being close together). The typology of love style based on Lee's love theory includes Eros (romantic love), Ludos (game-playing love), Pragma (logical love), Storage (friendship love), Mania (dependent love), and Agape (selfless love) (17). In a study among couples on the verge of marriage in Tuyserkan City, west of Iran, 89.5% of the participants mentioned love and affection, 87.7% chastity, and 86.8% spouse's mental health essential criteria of marriage (18). A study reported that men had a higher tendency toward Eros love than women, and attitudes toward Eros, Pragma, and Agape love were the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction (19).

Another critical question is about the relationship between emotional maturity and criteria for spouse selection, but few studies have been conducted on this issue. An emotionally mature one knows all one's emotions and feelings correctly and can provide appropriate emotional responses. The emotionally mature person has six major characteristics: taking responsibility (being aware of their privilege in the world and trying to take steps toward changing their behavior), showing empathy (feeling more concern for others and trying to find ways of helping), owning mistakes (apologizing when doing wrong), being unafraid of vulnerability (being honest about your feelings and building trust with those around), recognizing and accepting needs (helping others and recognizing their needs), and setting healthy boundaries (knowing how and when to define a line and not allowing others to cross it) (20). Research on 100 Indian couples revealed that emotional instability, social maladjustment, and personality disintegration facets of emotional maturity most predicted the overall marital adjustment in married couples (21). A study on a couple of people showed a negative meaningful relationship between marital satisfaction, emotional immaturity, and lack of independence (22).

A construct related to personality and interpersonal processes is Early Maladaptive Schemas (EMS), defined as a broad, pervasive theme or pattern comprised of memories, emotions, cognitions, and bodily sensations, regarding oneself and one's relationships with others. They are developed during childhood or adolescence, elaborated throughout the lifetime, and are dysfunctional to a significant degree. Schemas play the main role in shaping cognitive structures and act as filters to receive, organize, and process information (23). Research on university students showed that rejection and abandonment as two early maladaptive schemas were the predictors of spouse selection (24). The number of studies about recognizing criteria for spouse selection and understanding factors shaping these criteria in Iranian people is limited. In the current study, an attempt was made to investigate the predictive power of some variables, such as love or schema, about the process

and the content dimension of selecting a spouse in people on the verge of marriage who were referring to health centers.

2. Objectives

The present study aimed to predict the dimensions of spouse selection criteria with attitudes toward love, emotional maturity, and early maladaptive schemas in people on the verge of marriage in the city of Ahvaz, Iran.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample and Procedure

In the present cross-sectional study conducted in 2018, 184 people (91 females and 93 males) were selected using the convenience sampling method. The inclusion criteria were having an age between 15 - 45 years, referring to healthcare centers for pre-marriage laboratory tests, and having no history of a previous marriage. The exclusion criterion was having no history of psychological disorders, according to self-declaration. All information was collected anonymously, and the participants were free to fill out the questionnaire to observe ethical considerations. The data were first coded and then analyzed using statistical software.

3.2. Research Tools

3.2.1. Love Attitudes Scale

This scale was first developed by Hendrick et al. (25) to measure different attitudes toward love, based on Lee's love style model, and contains six subscales used to evaluate attitudes toward love. Scoring is based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In the initial research, the α coefficient of this scale for different styles of love was reported from 0.68 to 0.87. Mostafaiee and Pyvastehegar (26) calculated internal consistency reliability for six sub scale of this scale as follows: (1) Eros (romantic love, 0.69); (2) Ludos (game-playing love, 0.77); (3) Pragma (logical love, 0.67); (4) Storage (friendship love, 0.66); (5) Mania (dependent love, 0.70); and (6) Agape (selfless love, 0.69).

3.2.2. Emotional Maturity Scale

This self-report scale was developed by Singh and Bahargava and contains 48 questions and five subscales of emotional instability, emotional regression, social maladjustment, personality disintegration, and lack of independence. The questions should be answered on a Likert scale ranging from too much to never. The scale's internal consistency was calculated, and the values were as

follows: emotional instability (0.75), emotional regression (0.63), social maladjustment (0.58), personality disintegration (0.86), and lack of independence (0.42) (27). In Iran, the scale's reliability was reported 0.75 for the whole scale using the test-retest method (28).

3.2.3 Young Early Maladaptive Schema Scale-Short Form

The short form of the self-report scale of early maladjustment schemas was validated by Welburn et al. based on the original form of the schemas (29). The short form contains 75 questions and 11 subscales. Five main dimensions of the early maladjustment schemas are as follows: disconnection and rejection, impaired autonomy and performance, impaired limits, other-directedness, and insufficient self-control. The questions should be answered on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not apply to me at all) to 6 (exactly describes me). In an initial study, the scale's α coefficient was calculated at 0.95 for the whole scale. Besides, the scale's validity coefficient was calculated through the correlation coefficient with the Depression Questionnaire (0.70). In a study in Iran, the scale's Cronbach's alpha was reported from 0.60 to 0.87. Also, the convergent validity coefficient of the whole scale was calculated through its correlation with Beck's depression (0.42) (30).

3.2.4 Preference Criteria of Spouse Selection Inventory

This questionnaire was standardized by Refahi et al. (16) to identify criteria for spouse selection following Iranian culture. It is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 22 items and two criteria: (1) content spouse selection, including a set of psychological and personal characteristics; and (2) process spouse selection, including a set of actions that organize the family system. The questions should be answered on a Likert scale ranging from very insignificant to very important. After scoring the questionnaire, each category will have a score. The Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was piloted on 543 couples, resulting in 0.88 for process and 0.84 for content. Also, the construct validity for both content and process factors was calculated at 0.75 for the total variance of the inventory using the factor analysis method with the principal components method.

Moreover, a questionnaire was used to collect demographic data, including age, gender, and residence area.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS 22. The data are presented mean \pm deviation, and Pearson's correlation coefficient was used for statistical analysis. Also, stepwise linear regression analysis was used to investigate how attitudes toward love, emotional maturity, and early maladjustment

schemas predicted the dimensions of spouse selection in the participants.

4. Results

One hundred eighty-four people on the verge of marriage participated in the study. The mean age of the female and male participants was 22.5 ± 3.45 and 27.4 ± 4.22 , respectively. The participants' education level was as follows: 44 (23%) had a diploma or lower, and 140 (77%) had a bachelor's degree or higher. The mean \pm standard deviation of the research variables and correlation coefficients are described in Table 1.

The process spouse selection criteria had a significant negative association with the Eros variable ($P < 0.05$) but a significant positive association with the Pragma and Philo variables ($P < 0.01$ and $P < 0.05$, respectively). Also, The process spouse selection criteria had a negative association with and emotional regression, lack of independence, and disconnection and rejection ($P < 0.01$) but a positive association with entitlement and insufficient ($P < 0.01$).

There was a significant positive association between the content spouse selection criteria and the Eros and Mania variables ($P < 0.05$ and $P < 0.01$, respectively). Moreover, there was a positive association between the content spouse selection criteria and emotional instability and lack of independence, disconnection and rejection, and performance and impaired autonomy ($P < 0.01$). However, the content spouse selection criterion did not have any significant association with the other variables. The results of stepwise linear regression analysis to predict the process spouse selection are shown in Table 2.

In the first step, Pragma explained only 20% (Adj. $R^2 = 0.2$; $F = 18.72$; $P < 0.001$) of spouse selection. In the next step, Pragma and lack of independence together predicted 40% (Adj. $R^2 = 0.40$; $F = 15.88$; $P < 0.001$) of spouse selection. In the last step, Pragma, lack of independence, and disconnection and rejection predicted 50% (Adj. $R^2 = 0.40$; $F = 15.88$; $P < 0.001$) of spouse selection. Stepwise regression analysis showed that Pragma and disconnection and rejection had the highest and lowest predictive power, respectively.

The results of stepwise linear regression analysis to predict the content spouse selection are shown in Table 3.

In the first step, Eros predicted 20% (Adj. $R^2 = 0.20$; $F = 15.93$; $P < 0.001$) of spouse selection. In the next step, Eros and lack of independence together predicted 30% (Adj. $R^2 = 0.30$; $F = 15.88$; $P < 0.001$) of spouse selection. Finally, in the last step, Eros, lack of independence, impaired autonomy, and performance predicted 66% (Adj. $R^2 = 0.66$; $F = 15.38$; $P < 0.001$) of spouse selection. Stepwise regression analysis revealed that Eros and impaired autonomy and

Table 1. The Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Coefficients Between the Variables (N = 184)

Variables	SD ± Mean	Process Spouse Selection Criteria	Content Spouse Selection Criteria
Content spouse selection	4.54 ± 47.19		
Process spouse selection	5.53 ± 19.44		
Eros	2.41 ± 13.01	-0.12*	0.45*
Ludos	2.93 ± 3.36	-0.02	0.05
Storage	4.20 ± 11.64	-0.07	-0.04
Pragma	2.72 ± 12.38	0.44**	0.04
Mania	2.75 ± 9.70	-0.03	0.33**
Philo	2.87 ± 11.02	0.30*	0.05
Emotional Instability	5.01 ± 18.40	0.07	0.33**
Emotional Regression	5.27 ± 15.88	-0.20**	-0.10
Social Maladjustment	4 ± 17.77	0.14	-0.12
Personality Disintegration	4.21 ± 14.27	0.06	-0.14
Lack of Independence	3.47 ± 16.82	-0.45**	0.35**
Disconnection & Rejection	6.67 ± 44.21	-0.31**	0.19**
Impaired Autonomy & Performance	9.82 ± 28.69	0.10	0.40**
Impaired Limits	9.08 ± 25.20	0.04	0.12
Other-Directedness	6.66 ± 22.3	0.03	0.03
Entitlement & Insufficient	8.09 ± 25.6	0.30**	0.09

Table 2. Stepwise Linear Regression Analysis to Predict Process Spouse Selection Criteria

Criterion Variable	Predictive Variable	R ²	F	P	B	β	t	P
Process spouse selection	Pragma	0.20	18.72	< 0.001	0.27	0.18	2.18	< 0.001
	Pragma, lack of independence	0.40	18.21	< 0.001	0.16-	0.11-	1.11	< 0.001
	Pragma, lack of independence and disconnection & rejection	0.50	11.62	< 0.001	0.11-	-0.09	1.50	< 0.001

Table 3. Stepwise Linear Regression Analysis to Predict Content Spouse Selection Criteria

Criterion Variable	Predictive Variables	R ²	F	P	B	β	t	P
Content spouse selection	Eros	0.20	15.93	< 0.001	0.43	0.26	3.59	< 0.001
	Eros, lack of independence	0.30	15.88	< 0.001	0.18	0.14	3.01	< 0.001
	Eros, Lack of independence & Impaired autonomy and performance	0.66	15.38	< 0.001	0.10	0.11	2.16	< 0.001

performance had the highest and lowest predictive power, respectively.

5. Discussion

Our results showed that the mean value of criteria for content spouse selection was higher than that for process spouse selection. This result is consistent with Re-fahi et al.'s findings (16), who emphasized the two different spouse criteria, such as content (physical attractiveness

and attention to some demographic criteria) and process criteria (organizing the family and coping skills). Moreover, according to a study, attitudes to love could predict marriage satisfaction. Thus, based on the findings of the current study, Pragma (logical love) was the best predictor for the criteria of process spouse selection, and Eros (romantic love) was the best predictor for the criteria of content spouse selection, which is consistent with previous studies (18, 19). The results showed that emotional instability had a positive correlation with content spouse selec-

tion and emotional regression had a negative correlation with process spouse selection. However, no linear regression was observed between these variables. This finding is inconsistent with Noranni and Refahi's (20) research findings.

According to the β index, lack of independence and disconnection and rejection, in a negative direction, had the next highest predictive power with process criteria spouse and in a positive direction, had the best predictive power for content spouse selection. This finding is consistent with previous findings (23, 24).

5.1. Conclusion

Young people have criteria for selecting a spouse based on their values and beliefs. Pragma love predicts the spouse selection process, but if content spouse selection is used, Eros love is the best predictor. According to the currently available results, individuals with process spouse selection criteria have an independent emotional maturity process. However, for individuals with content spouse selection criteria, the vice versa is true. Early maladaptive schemas are poor predictors of spouse selection. It can be concluded that those with process spouse selection criteria have lower levels of disconnection and rejection, and those with process spouse selection criteria have lower levels of impaired autonomy and performance. These results help premarital counselors teach appropriate spouse selection methods to people on the verge of marriage. However, due to the limitations of the study, caution should be exerted in generalizing the findings. The major limitation of the study was related to the use of the convenience sampling method. Also, we had a limited number of male and female participants and thus could not analyze their beliefs separately. We suggest researchers consider personality traits and make intercultural comparisons about them.

Acknowledgments

We sincerely thank the staff of the East and West Health Center of the city of Ahvaz and the participants who helped us in performing the current research.

Footnotes

Authors' Contribution: S. B. N. and A. P. were responsible for the design and study concept. M. M. Z. H. read the manuscript and was responsible for data analysis. S. B. N. wrote the paper.

Conflict of Interests: None to declare.

Ethical Approval: This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz (code: EE/9803403069750/scu.ac.ir).

Funding/Support: This article was supported by the Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz with the grant number scu.EP99.608.

Informed Consent: The study's main objectives were fully explained to the participants, and they were assured that information obtained from the tools would remain confidential.

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