Research Article

Relationship Between Dimensions of Perceived Social Support and Desire for Marriage Among Academic Students

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aimed to investigate the relationship between perceived social support dimensions and desire for marriage among students.

Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted among all male and female students of Allameh Tabataba'i University in the academic year 2015 - 16. The sample studied consisted of 200 students (100 males and 100 females). The research instrument was the "multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS), 1988" and "questionnaire to evaluate interest in marriage". Data analysis was performed by the independent samples *t*-test, Pearson correlation coefficient, and stepwise regression.

Results: The results showed that the variable "significant others" could explain the feedback towards marriage, the attitude to the consequences of marriage, and the total score of desire for marriage. Also, the total score of perceived social support could explain the readiness and desire for marriage. The results of the regression coefficient showed that the total score of perceived social support could predict barriers to marriage.

Conclusions: The results of this study confirmed the role of perceived social support and its dimensions in predicting students' desire for marriage. These findings can be used in public health interventions related to marriage and the family.

Keywords: Perceived Social Support, Willingness to Marry, Desire for Marriage, Students

1. Background

Marriage is one of the most important events in human life that influences life from various aspects. In addition to being associated with mental and spiritual relaxation in individuals, marriage is crucial for the survival of human society (1). Many psychologists and family experts believe that delayed marriage in Iran's society is a major challenge, which can turn into a social crisis if it is left uncontrolled (2). The investigation of marriage age of Iranians has shown an upward trend in recent decades. While the average marriage age of males and females was 19.7 and 24.1 in 1976, it increased to 23.0 and 27.4 in 2016, respectively (3). Meantime, the average marriage age of men and women was even higher in urban areas (23.4 and 27.8 in 2016, respectively). Whatever these figures are, they indicate an irrational increase in marriage age. Such increases would cause serious damage to normative and customary societies from many perspectives.

Previous studies have shown that the desire of young people for marriage has decreased or is decreasing in both developed and developing countries (4, 5). One of the factors possibly effective in the individuals' desire for marriage is the level of social support. Many studies have shown a significant relationship between social support and quality of life, marital problems, stress, depression, mental health, and the level of marital instability (6-11).

2. Objectives

Since marriage is essential for meeting the individual and collective requirements of a community and it has a deterministic role in forming one of the most important communities, i.e. the family, it is necessary to examine the factors affecting tendency towards marriage. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the predictability of youth's satisfaction with marriage in terms of the level of social support perceived by students.

3. Methods

3.1. Population, Sample, and Sampling Method

This cross-sectional study was conducted in 2016 on the students of Allameh Tabataba'i University of Tehran, Iran. The population of this study consisted of all undergraduate and graduate students of Allameh Tabataba'i University, who were studying in the academic year 2015 - 16. Using the census method, all students were enrolled in the study and 236 questionnaires were distributed to them. The exclusion criteria included students who were not willing to participate in the study. Finally, 200 completed questionnaires were collected and analyzed (response rate = 85%).

In this research project, we investigated the relationship between the perceived social support components (family, friends, and significant others), as independent variables, and the components of desire for marriage (marital feedback, readiness and desire for marriage, attitudes towards marriage consequences, and barriers to marriage), as dependent variables. Among the components of desire for marriage, the general issues and areas of interest in marriage, including "general attitude towards marriage, family, spouse, and marital relationship" and "individual's feedback about his readiness for marriage", were evaluated at the practical and mental level. Other demographic variables included age, sex, education level, and marital status.

3.2. Tools

3.2.1. Multi-dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

A multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS), which subjectively evaluates the social support adequacy, was designed by Zimet et al. (12) and its validity and reliability were confirmed by Zimet et al. (12). This scale includes 12 items to assess social support perceived from three sources of the family (four subscales), friends (four subscales), and significant others (four subscales). In this questionnaire, each subscale is graded on a seven-point Likert spectrum from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (7). The range of scores on this scale is 12 - 84. On this scale, as the individuals' scores increase, their scores in the general factor of perceived social support increase, as well. In addition, the individuals' total scores in each of the three subscales are obtained by summing the individuals' scores on each item.

3.2.2. Marriage Motivation Inventory (Prasad)

This inventory contains 24 questions, including 23 five-option questions and an additional question for the mar-

riage golden age. The questionnaire has four factors including "marital feedback", "readiness and desire for marriage", "attitudes towards marriage consequences", and "barriers to marriage", which is believed to be valid and reliable. For each of the questions of Prasad, five response options were considered, including "completely agree", "agree", "abstention", "disagree", and "completely disagree". The scoring of questions 1, 2, 9, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19, 22, and 23 is as follows: 5 for "completely agree", 4 for "agree", 3 for "abstention", 2 for "disagree", and 1 for "completely disagree". The scoring of questions that indicate "reluctance to marriage" (questions 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 20, and 21) is as follows: 1 for completely agree, 2 for agree, 3 for abstentions, 4 for disagree, and 5 for completely disagree. The sum of the scores shows the individual's desire for marriage. The validity and reliability of the marriage motivation inventory were previously confirmed (13).

To analyze the data and determine the relationship between the variables, the Pearson correlation coefficient, stepwise regression, and independent *t*-test were used in SPSS version 22 software. A P value of lower than 0.05 was considered as the significance level.

4. Results

The mean age of male students was 23.9 years and the mean age of female students was 21.18 years. More than half (54%) of the subjects were undergraduates and 87.6% reported their marital status as single. The demographic characteristics of the students are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Students

Variables	Values
Age (mean)	
Male	23.9
Female	21.18
Marital status, %	
Single	88
Married	12
Grade, %	
Undergraduate	54
Postgraduate	46
Religion, %	
Shia	95.5
Sunni	4.5

Table 2 indicates that the average score of perceived social support was 60.9 ($\pm$ 12.8) for the total population.

The average scores of perceived social support and desire for marriage were slightly higher in females than in males (64.1 vs. 57.7 and 83.8 vs. 77.3, respectively).

The results of the correlation test in Table 3 show that there were significant positive correlations between most research variables. The majority of these variables had significant relationships with each other at a confidence level of 99% (except for the variables "family", "attitudes towards marriage consequences", "friends", and "marital feedback" that had a 95% confidence level). These correlations indicate that as perceived social support and its components increase, the students' desire for marriage increases. Interestingly, the correlation between none of the research variables was negative. The only variables that their correlation was not recognized as significant were the family component and marital feedback. According to the results, it can be concluded that there is a positive correlation between perceived social support and its components and the students' desire for marriage; as the students' perceived social support increases, their desire for marriage increases.

The stepwise linear regression model was used to investigate the significance of the correlation coefficient between perceived social support dimensions and the desire for marriage. A summary of the stepwise regression model is shown in Table 4, showing that the variable "significant others", which is one of the dimensions of perceived social support, could predict the marital feedback so that 10.3% of the variance related to the variable "marital feedback" was explained by the variable "significant others". Moreover, the total score of the variable "perceived social support" could predict the variable "readiness and desire for marriage" and 14.3% of the variance related to readiness and desire for marriage was explained by the total score of perceived social support. The variable "significant others" could predict the attitude toward marriage consequences and 6.3% of the variance related to the attitude towards marriage consequences was explained by the variable "significant others". Also, the results of the regression coefficient showed that the total score of perceived social support could predict the variable "barriers to marriage" and 10.2% of the variance related to the barriers to marriage was explained by the total score of perceived social support. The variable "significant others" also could predict the total score of desire for marriage and 14.7% of the variance related to desire for marriage was explained by the variable "significant others".

According to Table 5, the *t*-test indicated the perceived social support and its components, i.e. family, friends, and significant others, were significantly different between fe-

males and males. This confirms the hypothesis that there is a significant difference between females and males in terms of the extent of perceived social support and its components.

According to Table 6, the *t*-test indicated that except for the variable "marital feedback", females and males had significant differences in desire for marriage and its components, i.e. readiness for marriage, attitudes towards marriage, and barriers to marriage. This does not confirm the hypothesis that the two groups have a significant difference in marital feedback; however, this confirms the hypothesis that there are significant differences in the total score of desire for marriage, readiness for marriage, attitudes towards marriage, and its barriers.

5. Discussion

Marriage is an important and complex social phenomenon that is considered a source of family formation. As an important social, biological, and cultural phenomenon, marriage has always been taken into account in public opinion and scientific and academic research. Accordingly, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between perceived social support and the desire for marriage among male and female students.

The results of the correlation coefficient test indicated that there were significant positive correlations between most variables in research. There were significant positive correlations between the total score of perceived social support and its components (family, friends, and significant others) and the desire for marriage and its components (marital feedback, readiness and desire for marriage, attitudes towards marriage consequences, and barriers to marriage). Most of these variables showed a significant relationship at a 99% confidence level (except for the variables family and attitudes towards marriage consequences and the variables friends and marital feedback that had a significant correlation at a 95% confidence level). None of the correlation coefficients between the research variables were negative.

The only variables for which the correlation was not significant were the family component and marital feedback. According to the results, it can be concluded that there is a significant positive correlation between perceived social support and its components and the students' desire for marriage so that as perceived social support increases in students, their desire for marriage increases. These findings are in line with studies conducted by other researchers in different parts of the world (9, 11, 14-16). In explaining the results, it can be said that social sup-

Table 2. Perceived Social Support and Desire for Marriage in Participants by Gender

Variable	Group	Number	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perceived social support	Total	200	14	84	60.9	12.8
Desire for marriage	Total	200	38	109	80.6	13.8
Perceived social support	Female	100	22	84	64.1	13.0
Perceived social support	Male	100	14	84	57.7	11.9
Desire for marriage	Female	100	44	109	83.9	15.7
Desire for marriage	Male	100	38	105	77.3	10.8

Table 3. Correlation Coefficients of Components of Perceived Social Support and Desire for Marriage (N = 200)

Index/Variable	Mean ± SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Perceived social support										
1. Family	21.3 ± 4.9	1								
2. Friends	20.2 ± 5.0	0.454[a]	1							
3. Significant others	19.4 ± 6.0	0.396[a]	0.587[a]	1						
4. Total score of perceived social support	60.9 ± 12.9	0.742[a]	0.835[a]	0.844[a]	1					
Desire for marriage										
5. The feedback towards marriage	29.0 ± 6.6	0.1	0.167[b]	0.329[a]	0.257[a]	1				
6. Desire to marry	18.1 ± 3.7	0.276[a]	0.329[a]	0.323[a]	0.384[a]	0.381[a]	1			
7. Attitudes towards marriage consequences	23.1 ± 5.1	0.152[b]	0.196[a]	0.261[a]	0.523[a]	0.255[a]	0.563[a]	1		
8. Barriers to marriage	10.4 ± 2.2	0.197[a]	0.277[a]	0.31[a]	0.327[a]	0.215[a]	0.657[a]	0.488[a]	1	
9. Total score of desire for marriage	80.6 ± 13.9	0.21[a]	0.284[a]	0.389[a]	0.371[a]	0.809[a]	0.761[a]	0.846[a]	0.616[a]	1

[a] $p < 0.01$.
[b] $p < 0.05$.

Table 4. A Summary of the Stepwise Regression Model of Perceived Social Support Dimensions on Desire for Marriage

Criterion Variable	Predictor Variable	B	SE	P Value
Feedback towards marriage	Significant others	0.37	0.08	< 0.001
Readiness and desire for marriage	Total score of perceived social support	0.11	0.02	< 0.001
Attitudes towards marriage consequences	Significant others	0.22	0.58	< 0.001
Barriers to marriage	Total score of perceived social support	0.06	0.01	< 0.001
Total score of desire for marriage	Significant others	0.90	0.15	< 0.001

Abbreviations: B, coefficient; SE, standard error.

Table 5. Mean Difference in Perceived Social Support and Its Components Between Gender Groups

	Mean Difference	Std. Error	95% CI	P Value
Perceived social support	-6.43	1.76	-9.91, -2.95	< 0.001
Family	-1.63	0.68	-2.98, -0.28	0.018
Friends	-1.97	0.70	-3.34, -0.60	0.005
Significant others	-2.80	0.80	-4.45, -1.21	0.001

port is an essential factor in optimal human development; if it is positive and appropriate, it leads to the improved performance of the individual in different individual and social settings. Marriage is no exception and if young people and students receive appropriate social support from support sources in society, such as family, friends, etc., they

Table 6. Mean Difference in Desire for Marriage and Its Components Between Gender Groups

	Mean Difference	Std. Error	95% CI	P Value
Desire for marriage	-6.5	1.9	-10.3, -2.8	< 0.001
Feedback towards marriage	1.2	0.9	-0.7, 3.0	0.200
Readiness for marriage	-2.8	0.5	-3.8, -1.9	< 0.001
Attitudes towards marriage consequences	-2.2	0.7	-3.6, -0.8	< 0.001
Barriers to marriage	-2.7	0.2	-3.1, -2.2	< 0.001

will be more inclined toward this important issue.

In terms of predictability of the desire for marriage and its components through perceived social support, the stepwise regression test showed that the variable "significant others" as one of the dimensions of perceived social support could predict marital feedback and 10.3% of the variance related to marital feedback was explained by this variable. Also, the total score of perceived social support could predict readiness and desire for marriage and 14.3% of the variance related to readiness and desire for marriage was explained by the total score of perceived social support.

The variable "significant others" could predict the attitudes towards marriage consequences and 6.3% of the variance related to the attitudes towards marriage consequences was explained by the variable "significant others". Also, the results of the regression coefficient test indicated that the total score of perceived social support could predict the variable "barriers to marriage" and 10.2% of the variance related to barriers to marriage was explained by the total score of perceived social support. The variable "significant others" could also predict the total score of desire for marriage and 14.7% of the variance related to desire for marriage was explained by this factor. These findings are consistent with previous research (9, 11, 15-17).

In the possible explanation of these findings, it can be said that social support is considered a factor contributing to all-around growth of human being whose perception of or inability to perceive it leads to significant changes in the way he/she looks at life and how he/she interacts with the environment. Since marriage is one of the most important and complex decisions in life, it has some special difficulties that require special attention and support from people in society, especially the family, friends, and close people, so that one can take the path correctly. Therefore, the more support one perceives from support sources in society, the better and more appropriately he responds to it; in the same way, his desire to establish deep links with others is further enhanced in light of this support.

In the case of the variable "significant others", which is

one of the components of perceived social support, it can be said that the support offered by different sources has different degrees of effectiveness. The more important and more attractive the source of support is to the individual, the more effective it will be for him and the more strongly it will be perceived by him.

The results showed a significant difference between male and female students in terms of perceived social support and its components, including family, friends, and significant others and females had higher scores in these variables than males. In the possible explanation of these findings, it can be said that boys, with regard to their personality traits, are less likely to receive social support than females, and are more likely to rely on their own power and ability to deal with problems than females do. Other factors in this regard include the stereotypes that exist about the role of sex in society and the perception that men and boys are individuals who need to be independent, self-serving, and helpers (not help-receivers).

The results of the ANOVA test showed a significant difference between male and female students in the variables, including readiness and desire for marriage, the attitudes towards marriage consequences, barriers to marriage, and the total score of desire for marriage and females took higher scores than males. A possible explanation of these findings is that there are more barriers to marriage for males than for females in Iran. The most important barriers that affect the desire for marriage are unemployment, lack of job stability, lack of adequate financial resources, and failure to find a suitable person according to their criteria. Moreover, another barrier is the influence of the country's culture, which considers the man responsible for the alimony of his family, and these expectations make marriage less desirable for males (18).

5.1. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it can be proposed that to resolve the problem of the reluctance of young people to marry, we can organize workshops and training programs for families, students, and people who are reluctant to marry and form a family. These programs would

aim to clarify the relationship between perceived social support and the desire for marriage. Since the present study showed the relationship between social support and desire for marriage, conducting workshops and seminars to increase the awareness of young people and their families about these types of support and their importance can benefit in the long run and avoid delayed marriage in young people. The present study merely examined the role of perceived social support and its dimensions in predicting the desire for marriage in the youth, so the results are only important in identifying the effect of this variable on the desire for marriage. Therefore, it would be very useful to find out the other variables affecting the desire for marriage. Also, to judge the relationship between perceived social support and the desire for marriage more precisely, as well as to generalize the results, it is proposed to conduct more comprehensive research with "more sample size of other populations.

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