



## The Role of Children in Women's Marital Satisfaction in Tehran, 2016

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** One of the important factors affecting women's satisfaction with their marital life and the stability of family foundation is children. Several studies on the impact of the number and gender of children on marital satisfaction have shown conflicting results. This study is intended to explore the role of children on women's marital satisfaction.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional study was conducted on 264 married women living in Tehran. Data collection tool was a two-part questionnaire containing demographic information and the modified version of Enrich marital satisfaction scale. Data analyzed by SPSS software, version 17. Indeed, Chi-square, Mann-Whitney and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests and linear regression were employed. Significance level was taken 0.05.

**Results:** The results suggested that mean  $\pm$  standard deviation [1] of marital satisfaction score for all research units was  $37.28 \pm 6.24$ . Generally, the average score of marital satisfaction for women without any children was higher compared to those with one or two children. Moreover, women whose first child was a girl had a higher average score in marital satisfaction than those whose first child was a boy. According to the results of multiple linear regression model, a significant predictor of women's marital satisfaction was the gender of the first baby ( $P = 0.01$ ).

**Conclusions:** The results demonstrated that generally women with no child had higher marital satisfaction and the gender of the child in our research community played a determinant role in their marital satisfaction. Analytical studies in which the intervening variables are controlled are recommended.

## INTRODUCTION

Marital satisfaction is the visible and evident feeling of pleasure and satisfaction of both husband and wife with their marriage and companionship [2]. Marital satisfaction

is a critical factor in life that influences women's health [3]. Duration of marriage, number of children, age, occupation and economic factors affect marital satisfaction [4].

Children and child rearing practices are one out of ten dimensions of couples' marital satisfaction [5]. Children as a major sources of satisfaction with life can play a crucial role in preserving a marital relationship [6]. Studies have indicated that the number, age and gender of children and spacing of children play a significant role in women's marital satisfaction [7, 8].

Evidence indicates that number of children contributes to variations in marital stability [6] so that some studies have demonstrated that the number of children is associated with the degree of marital satisfaction [9]. A meta-analytical study by Twenge et al, (2003) illustrated that there is a significant inverse correlation between the number of children and marital satisfaction [10] but Marini's study (1980) indicated that the number of children in the family has no direct effect on marital satisfaction [11]. The results of a study conducted in Malaysia revealed that the number of children has a positive correlation with marital satisfaction [12] and another study reported that women with higher marital satisfaction are more interested in being a mother during the first 4 to 6 years of their marriage [13]. The child's gender affects one's married life state, family structure and reproductive performance [14]. Evidence suggests that divorce rate in couples whose first child is a girl is high [14].

A study by Agbor et al, (2014) demonstrated that women usually are fonder of a baby boy to promote the stability and security of their marriage [15]. Giving birth to the first baby will lead to reduced marital satisfaction and occurrence of conflicts [16, 17]. A study by Hirschberger et al, (2009) found that marital satisfaction of couples will decrease over almost 15 years after giving birth to the first baby [18].

Houlston et al, (2013) considered the following reasons for reduced marital satisfaction during the transition period to parenthood: to meet the needs of the baby lowered relationships between husband and wife, shorter times of being together for the couple, and imbalance in the house chores [19]. In general, several studies show conflicting results regarding the role of children in women's marital satisfaction. Therefore, as children are significantly effective in marital relationships, current study aims to determine the role of children in women's marital satisfaction in Iran (Tehran).

## METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted on 264 married women in Tehran from July 2015 to December 2016. In this study, healthcare centers affiliated to clinics located on the northern and eastern districts of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical

Sciences were selected using multistage random sampling. Then, each randomly selected center was selected using convenience sampling. Inclusion criteria were as follows: Iranian women living in Tehran at their reproductive age with running files at healthcare centers affiliated to Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences who were literate and able to read and write.

After receiving code of ethics IR.SBMU.RETECH.REC.1395.369 from Behavioral Science Research Center of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, the research process was carried out. Written consent was received from all participants and they were assured of confidentiality of their information.

Data collection tool was a two-part questionnaire including:

Demographic and obstetric information including the number of children, the ideal number of children at the time of marriage and now, spacing of children and duration of marriage.

The short form of Enrich marital satisfaction scale: To the 10-item Enrich satisfaction survey scale was assigned codes 5 to 1, respectively, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Therefore, a higher total score indicated more marital satisfaction. Items 9,3,5,1 and 8 were inversely coded. According to a study by Alidousti et al. (2015) this tool has acceptable validity and reliability in Iran and its Chronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.74 [20].

Data analysis was performed by means of SPSS software, version 17. Indeed, Chi-square, Mann-Whitney and Kolmogorov- Smirnov tests and linear regression were employed. Significance level was taken 0.05.

## RESULTS

Present study was intended to determine the role of children in married women's marital satisfaction. The average ages of the research subjects and their spouses were respectively 30.5 and 34.74 years old. The majority of research subjects (56.7%) were housewife and most of them had academic education (48.9%). A larger part (48.5%) had no child preference at all. [Table 1](#) presents demographic characteristics of female participants of current study.

Mean  $\pm$  Standard deviation of marital satisfaction score for all research subjects was  $37.28 \pm 6.24$ . Generally, the average marital satisfaction in all research subjects was optimal. [Table 2](#) illustrates Mean  $\pm$  Standard deviation of marital satisfaction scores in classification of research subjects in terms of the number and gender of children. Overall, the average marital satisfaction score for women with no child was higher compared to that of women with one or two

children or women whose first baby was either a boy or a girl. Likewise, women whose first baby was a girl achieved higher scores in marital satisfaction than those whose first baby was a boy.

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics and Reproductive Performance of Research Subjects

Variable	Values
Age	30.5 ± 7.73
Spouse's age	34.74 ± 7.6
Current number of children	0.93 ± 0.7
Ideal number of children at the time of marriage	2.2 ± 0.9
Ideal number of children now	1.84 ± 0.66
Age of marriage	22.37 ± 4.7
Duration of marriage	8.85 ± 6.61
<b>Gender preference</b>	
Male	49 (18.6%)
Female	87 (33%)
No difference	128 (48.5%)
<b>Job</b>	
Working	119 (43.3%)
Housewife	156 (56.7%)
<b>Education</b>	
Elementary school	10 (3.8%)
Secondary school	30 (11.4%)
High school	95 (36%)
University	129 (48.9%)

Data are presented as Mean ± SD or No.(%)

**Table 2:** The Average Scores of Marital Satisfaction based on the Number and Gender of Children

Variable	Marital satisfaction score
no child (n=77)	38.85 (6.64)
With one child (n=129)	36.51 (5.84)
With two children (n=58)	36.89 (6.29)
No child (n=77)	38.85 (6.64)
The first child is a boy (n=96)	35.94 (5.75)
The first child is a girl (n=91)	37.35 (6.1)

**Table 3:** Multiple Linear Regression for Predicting the Factors Affecting Marital Satisfaction

Variables	SE	Beta	P-value
Number of children	3.05	- 0.34	0.33
Duration of marriage	0.34	0.21	0.55
Age of marriage	0	0.42	0.24
Family type (no child, single child, two children)	3.1	0.5	0.15
Gender of first child	0.68	0.21	0.01

According to the results obtained from multiple regression model (Table 3), the first child was a critical predictor of marital satisfaction ( $P = 0.01$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The results of current study suggested that generally marital satisfaction of the research subjects was optimal. Moreover, although having a child (children) was accompanied by lower marital satisfaction so that marital satisfaction score for women with no child was higher than that of those with one or two children, the number of children was not considered a predictor of marital satisfaction for our subjects. Some studies have reported similar findings. A study carried out by Rostami et al. (2014) found that marital satisfaction of couples with no child (in terms of communications, pleasurable and favorable activities and sexual activity) was higher than those with one or more children [9]. Similarly, Mirfardi et al. (2010) concluded that the number of children had an inverse significant correlation with women's marital satisfaction so that a larger number of children reduced marital satisfaction [21]. Ghahremani et al (2017) reported in his study that the number of children was significantly correlated with the average score of women's marital satisfaction at their reproductive age so that a larger number of children decreased women's marital satisfaction [22]. In this respect, a meta-analytical study by Dillon et al. (2010) indicated that there was an inverse correlation between children and marital satisfaction [23]. Animasahun et al. (2012) demonstrated that marital satisfaction in couples with fewer children was higher than in those with more children [24]. However, in some studies, children had a positive effect on greater marital satisfaction so that Onyishi et al. (2012) in his study in Nigeria reported that there was a positive significant correlation between the number of children and marital satisfaction [25]. Though some evidence indicates that a larger number of children increases marital stability [26], some studies suggest no relationship between the number of children and marital satisfaction. In other words, even if marital stability increases, marital satisfaction will not raise. Marini (1980) reported that there is no significant association between the number and spacing of children and marital satisfaction [11]. Another study in Italy indicated that the number, age and spacing of children have different contributions in the stability of marital relationships [27]. In describing the findings of current and similar studies we can state that since each child has his/her own demands and consequently the couple can spend less time for each other and together, women's marital satisfaction is reduced by giving birth to each baby. However, regarding the development of facilities and greater knowledge of women on childrearing, the number of children plays a weaker role in women's marital satisfaction. Further, the results of present work revealed that women whose first baby was a girl had a higher average score in marital satisfaction compared to those whose first baby was a boy and the gender of the first child was an important predictor of marital satisfaction. The results obtained by Abbott et al. (1985)

demonstrated that reduced marital compatibility was a characteristic of mothers with two baby sons and mothers with a baby girl didn't show a considerable reduction in marital compatibility compared to women with no child [8]. Nevertheless, in a study by Ghahremani et al. (2017), gender of children was associated with marital satisfaction score so that marital satisfaction in women with a son was higher than in women with a daughter [22].

Some studies have found that gender of the baby affects the couple's relationships so that girls cause lower satisfaction with relationships in mothers and greater problems for fathers [16]. Some research indicated that divorce rate in couples with a son is lower and their marital satisfaction is high [26, 28]. Today, with promotion in educational level of Iranian women, attitudes towards children have changed and having a child, particularly a son, is no longer a concern for families [4]. Actually, higher educational level has declined gender preferences [29]. In traditional views, as boys took part in family economy and were social support, having a son was significantly valued and male gender was preferred to females. Couples in modern societies have recognized liberal norms and customs and rejected gender preferences [30]. On the other hand, it seems that boys have more demands as they grow older compared to girls, which may contribute in the couple's gender preferences. Conflicting results regarding the role of children's gender in marital satisfaction may be influenced by the research community and the measurement tools. However, future analytical studies that control the intervening variables are required to find the deeper associations between these variables. Obviously, this kind of information is very crucial in demographic planning.

Limitations: This descriptive study explored the role of children in marital satisfaction. It is suggested that future studies analytically control the intervening variables and longitudinal studies during the couples' lifecycle should be carried out.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results of current study revealed that generally women with no child had higher marital satisfaction the gender of the child in our research community played a determinant role in marital satisfaction. Of the strengths of this study we can refer to random sampling, application of standard tools for measuring marital satisfaction and analytical-statistical tests. With respect to the contradictory results obtained from different studies, analytical studies that control the intervening variables are recommended.

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## ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

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## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Giti Ozgoly developed the original idea, study concept and design and study supervision. Tayebeh Darooneh had main role in the interpretation of data and writing the manuscript. Other authors: Marzieh Saei Ghare naz and Fahimeh Hajizadeh Bandeghara study concept and design, critical revision of the manuscript; Malihe Nasiri analysis of data, Farnaz Kholosi data collection.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None of the authors has any conflicts of interest to declare.

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