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**Equity and Marital Satisfaction in Iranian Employed and  
Unemployed Women**

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**Abstract**

The aims of the present study are twofold: (1) Is there any relationship between equity and its components with marital satisfaction? (2) Is there any difference in equity between employed and unemployed women? In this study 100 women were selected with convenient sampling and they responded to marital equity researcher-made questionnaire and Hudson marital satisfaction index (IMS). The main findings indicated that there are positive and significant correlations between equity and its components and marital satisfaction. Also we found a meaningful difference in equity between employed and unemployed women, as employed women felt more in equity in their marital relationship.

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**1. Introduction**

The resources of marital conflict do change with different factors. One of these factors is social changes formed in the family structure (Patterson & et al).

Not long ago, there were the sex role patterns in the family e.g. men were responsible for affording his family's livelihood and women were responsible for doing the housework and raising children. Women had low authority in the family and society; in contrast, society and family were more monarchical. But nowadays, on the one hand, economic problems and changes in families' expectations of life have forced them to make more money. On the other hand, women are interested in showing their abilities and interests, which have led to increasing numbers of women in the workforces (; Franco & Winquist, 2002; Di Jong & Broekman, 2003; Mkaula & et al, 2008).

Researchers often cite the increased numbers of women in the workforce as having affected changes in women's power, in sex-role expectations, and in marital ideals (Van Yperen and Buunk, 1994). One particular change is that marital partners are striving for more equality in the distribution of domestic, economic, and emotional contributions to their relationships (Scanzoni and Scanzoni 1988). Moreover, researchers often cite the social changes in family employment and power patterns don't engender a similar change in Family work, including care giving activities and power patterns which has led to dissatisfaction among couples, especially women. (Azar, 1996).

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One of the theories explaining conflict and dissatisfaction between couples is equity theory. According to principals of equity theory, people keep track of inputs and outputs and comparison ratio of the two. Equity theory states that people are most satisfied when their input to the relationship closely approximates their outcome from the relationship (Homans, 1961). When individuals receive more rewards than they are entitled to their given inputs and receive fewer rewards than they are entitled to their given inputs, they will be distressed by the inequity, although when they receive fewer rewards they will be more distressed and dissatisfied in relationship. (Hatfield, Utne, & Traupmann, 1979). Also, Hatfield et al (2011) address the role of power in equity theory by postulating that people will try to persuade others that their contributions are more valuable than the others' contributions. Those who successfully accomplish this will receive more benefits, will be able to persuade others that they are entitled to more benefits, and will develop ideologies that reinforce their right to receive more benefits. Equity theory notes that, with increased numbers of women in the workforce they feel more contributed than men in relationship and inequity and are entitled to more and encourage them to begin efforts to change the allocation of benefits.

Various studies have investigated equity / inequity and its impact on women's satisfaction. Some studies (e.g., Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990; Benjamin, 2006; Hess et al; 2009) investigated equity globally and they concluded that there is a meaningful relationship between equity and marital satisfaction. Because of high relationship between equity and marital satisfaction, some studies cautiously asserted that the relationship between these two variables is causal (Benjamin, 2006., Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). Also, some studies (e.g., Greenstein, 2009; Carriero, 2011; Frisco & Williams , 2003) investigating the relationship between equity in the household labor division and marital satisfaction, concluded that there is a meaningful relationship between these two variables. Moreover, some studies comparing equity between employed and unemployed women, have reported that employed women feel more often deprived and inequitable especially in the household labor division than unemployed women (e.g. Hochschild & Machung, 1989., Stoltz-Loike, 1992., Wiersma, 1994).

Since, these social changes, like increasing numbers of women in the workforce, occurred in Iran too (Iran Statistics center, 2009) in order to find out the effect of equity/inequity in women's satisfaction in Iran, this study investigates the relationship between equity and marital satisfaction and compares equity in employed and unemployed women. The research questions are as follows: (1) is there any relationship between equity and its components and marital satisfaction? (2) is equity different between employed and unemployed women?

## 2. Materials and Methods

**Samples:** In this descriptive study, 100 participants were selected via convenient sampling among employed women in Shiraz University and mothers of kindergarten children. 27 percent of these 100 women, had one child, the rest had between 2 to 4 children. 82.8 percent of couples have been married for less than 10 years, while 20.2 percent of couples have been married for 10 years or more. The marriage length was between 4 and 18. The couple's ages in this study were between 22 and 35 years old. The women of both employed and unemployed groups were homogenized in numbers of children and marriage length.

### 2.1. Instrument

**Marital equity:** researcher-made questionnaire of marital equity comprises 26 items and 4 sub-scales of equity in the family work division, equity in power division, equity in paying attention to each other's demands and equity in respecting to each other's relatives. The validity of this questionnaire was verified by six psychology professors. Then, the questionnaire was sent to Dr. E. Hatfield and based on his suggestions, the questions were revised. Alpha coefficients of the questionnaire for the sub-scales of equity in the family work division, equity in power division,

equity in paying attention to each other’s demands and equity in respecting to each other’s relatives are 0.76, 0.72, 0.81, and 0.81, respectively.

**Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS):** The IMS is a 25-item questionnaire that measures the extent to which problems are encountered in romantic relationships (Hudson, 1982a. b) (e.g. “I feel that my partner treats me badly”). The IMS is intended to measure relationship satisfaction, and not adjustment levels and was originally developed for use with married couples, any reference to “spouse” was rewarded as “partner.” The index has demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a mean alpha of 0.96; and temporal stability, with a test-retest correlation of 0.96 (Corcoran & Fischer, 1987, Marine & Myriam, 2004). The Cronbach alpha coefficient in the present study was 0.85.

### 3. Findings

At first we point out the relationship between equity and its components and marital satisfaction. Then, we indicate a difference in equity between employed and unemployed women.

As table 1 illustrates, there is a strong and significant correlation between equity, its components and marital satisfaction. These findings indicate that women in equitable marriages feel more satisfied, whereas those in inequitable marriages feel dissatisfied.

Table1. Simple correlation coefficients between equity and its components and marital satisfaction

	Marital satisfaction
equity	-0.61*
equity in division of family work	-0.64*
equity in marital power	-0.59*
equity in paying attention to each other’s demands	-0.62*
equity in respecting to each other’s relatives	-0.60*

Significant Level: \* P < 0.01

Since, in the Index of marital satisfaction (IMS) higher score indicates more dissatisfaction and lower scores indicate more satisfaction; correlations are negative so there is a positive relationship between equity and marital satisfaction.

To compare equity between employed and unemployed women, an independent sample T-test was conducted. Means and standard deviations of equity for employed and unemployed women are shown in table 2.

Table2. The results of independent sample T-test

	N	M	SD	t	df	p
employed	50	3.07	.46	-2.02	98	.045
unemployed	50	3.28	.58			

As table 2 shows, equity between employed and unemployed women is significantly different.

#### 4. Discussion

These findings suggest that there is a relationship between equity and marital satisfaction and employed condition affects equity in women. These findings indicate high consistent with theoretical and empirical literature :

According to equity theory, people in equitable marriages should be more satisfied, whereas those in inequitable marriages should be distressed, with distress increasing along with the degree of inequity (Walster, Traupmann, & Walster, 1978).

In research viewpoint, with respect to equity, these findings are consistent with most of researchers (e.g., Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990; Benjamin, 2006; Hess et al, 2009). Regarding the component of equity in division of family work, these findings are consistent with many studies (e.g., Frisco & Williams, 2003; Greenstein, 2009; Carriero, 2011). Also, related to the component of equity in marital power, these findings are consistent with most of the studies (e.g., Tang, 1999; Pimentel, 2000; Asoodeh, 2010; Bulanda, 2011).

Moreover, regarding comparing equity between employed and unemployed women, these findings are consistent with most of researches (e.g. Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Stoltz-Loike, 1992; Wiersma, 1994) finding out the differences between employed and unemployed women.

Generally, it is also concluded that despite the egalitarian changes in employment and power pattern in the Iranian families, many gender stereotypes about power division and family work still survive, which has led to dissatisfaction among women.

**Limitations:** Using convenience sampling is the study's limitation which has limited us to generalize research findings.

**Recommendation:** more research can be done on social, economic, SES background and ethnic differences in Iran and then it will be compared with different researches in other countries.

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