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Personality traits and mental divorce

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between personality traits and the cause of mental divorce in a sample of females. 161 females (50 nurses, 63 housewives, 48 high school teachers) were included in this study. All participants completed the NEO-FFI test (Costa, McCrae, 1987) and the Dyadic adjustment scale (Spanier, 1976). The individuals with higher level in the scales of extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness and agreeableness plus lower level in neurosis showed less rates in mental divorce.

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Keywords: personality traits; mental divorce; NEO-FFI test; Dyadic adjustment scale.

1. Introduction

An emergent literature on the intrapersonal correlates of marital adjustment (Bradbury, 1998; Gottman, 1994; Karney & Bradbury, 1997) reflects the prevailing notion that personality characteristics significantly contribute to positive and negative outcomes in marital relationships (Bouchard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 1999; Kosek, 1996; Kurdek, 1993; Nemechek & Olson, 1999; Russell & Wells, 1994). These personality characteristics typically derive from the five-factor or “Big Five” model of personality, which was developed from the lexical tradition of trait descriptors (e.g., Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1981; Norman, 1963).

Structural analyses of these descriptors have repeatedly revealed five broad factors: (1) neuroticism, which reflects individual differences in the extent to which a person perceives and experiences the world as threatening, problematic, and distressing; (2) extraversion, which implies an energetic approach to the social and material world and includes traits such as sociability, activity, assertiveness, and positive emotionality; (3) openness to experience, which describes the breadth, depth, originality and complexity of an individual’s mental and experiential life; (4) agreeableness, which contrasts prosocial and communal orientation toward others with antagonism and includes traits such as altruism, tender-mindedness, trust, and modesty; and (5) conscientiousness, which describes socially prescribed impulse control that facilitates task- and goal-directed behavior, such as thinking before acting, delaying gratification, following norms and rules, and planning, organizing, and prioritizing tasks. This five-factor structure has been shown to be quite robust across raters, sample characteristics, and cultures (e.g., Digman & Takemoto-Chock, 1981; McCrae & Costa, 1987, 1997).

The Five-Factor Model dimensions are related to a variety of important life outcomes (Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006). For example, high conscientiousness predicts good work performance and good health while low

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agreeableness and high neuroticism are associated with poor health. An important life outcome is satisfaction with an intimate (romantic) relationship. It seems likely that personality characteristics would express themselves in ways that affect intimate relationships. Greater intimate relationship satisfaction is associated with less relationship instability (or mental divorce) and lower relationship dissolution (Gottman & Levenson, 1992), more parenting satisfaction (Rogers & White, 1998) and better mental health (Beach et al, 2003).

The main theory of this research is showing that how personality characteristics are related to mental divorce. In the other words, positive characteristics have positive correlation with marital satisfaction and negative correlation with mental divorce. The secondary theory of this research is that different jobs for females are related to different levels of marital satisfaction and various personality characteristics.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The population of this study was composed of 161 married females who were in three groups. 48 high school teachers and 63 housewives were selected through random sampling and 50 nurses were selected through available sampling.

After necessary explanations about the research aims and gaining the cooperation of the participants, NEO-FFI test and Dyadic Adjustment Scale were administered. The mean age of participants was 37, within a range of 25 to 68. The education level of most of them was B.S. degree. Most of them have had 1 or 2 children. Economic status of 90% of them was good.

2.2. Instruments

DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE (DAS): This scale (Spanier,1976) is a test of 32 questions , 10 items of which have to do with Dyadic satisfaction (DS), 5 of Dyadic cohesion (DCoh), 12 of Dyadic consensus (DCon) and the remaining measure Affectional expression (AE). The questions, in 5-degree Likert scale, measure the participants' marital satisfaction from 1 to 5, in both men and women. The participants' grades in each scale were between 0 and 151. In the Persian form of this questionnaire (Mollazade, 2003) Cronbach Alpha of questions in each sub scale in a 312 women sample (218 married and 94 divorced) was respectively 0.94 , 0.81, 0.90 and 0.73. For all subjects, the overall Cronbach Alpha was 0.89. This indicates high internal consistency of the scale. The test-retest reliability of the scale was 0.86 which is high. Validity of Dyadic Adjustment Scale was measured by measuring the correlation coefficients between the sub scales of this test and the sub scales of Marital Adjustment Scale (Locke- Wallace, 1959), and also by analyzing the major factors of the test. The validity was 0.90 that confirms the validity of Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI): The NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1987), in 5-degree Likert scale, measures the "Big Five" personality traits: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness from 1 to 5. The NEO-FFI contains 60 items and each personality trait was derived by computing the mean of 12 different items (811). Correlation coefficients between the grades of 208 students, in a three-month interval, was measured for N, E, O, A and C and was respectively 0.83, 0.75, 0.80, 0.79 and 0.79 (Garousi, 2002). Internal consistency coefficient for each factor was respectively 0.86, 0.73, 0.56, 0.68 and 0.87, which indicates high internal consistency of the scale. Meanwhile, Atashrooz (2009) measured Cronbach Alpha for each factor and the result was 0.74, 0.55, 0.27, 0.38 and 0.77 respectively.

3. Results

Table 1 shows the statistical features of the subjects according to the scores of sub scales of NEO-FFI and Dyadic Adjustment scale for teachers, housewives and nurses.

Table 1. Mean, SD, Minimum and Maximum of females scores based on NEO-FFI and DAS

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
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Extraversion	28.53	6.1	12	43
Openness	26.1	4.68	12	40
conscientiousness	35.26	5.82	20	48
Agreeableness	34.01	5.33	20	47
Neuroticism	21.73	6.69	6	40
Overall satisfaction	107.35	52.34	38	144
Dyadic consensus	50.06	9.21	18	65
Affectional expression	9.03	2.44	0	12
Dyadic satisfaction	37.09	7.23	12	50
Dyadic cohesion	11.92	3.48	2	19

To analyze the data and to test the research hypotheses, first, results of correlations between each subscale of two tests were measured to show the relationship between personality traits and mental divorce (the opposite of marital satisfaction). The summary of the results of correlations and P-value of each one (Table 2) showed that there is significant relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction in any of these variables.

Table 2. Correlation and P-value for subscales of NEO-FFI and DAS

	Extraversion	Openness	conscientiousness	Agreeableness	Neuroticism	Overall satisfaction	Dyadic consensus	Affectional expression	Dyadic satisfaction	Dyadic cohesion
Extraversion		0.18 0.023	0.39 0	0.347 0	-0.514 0	0.213 0.007	0.401 0	0.432 0	0.417 0	0.498 0
Openness			0.203 0.01	0.162 0.04			0.161 0.42	0.175 0.026	0.171 0.03	0.246 0.002
Conscientiousness				0.371 0	-0.357 0	0.221 0.005	0.31 0	0.199 0.011	0.214 0.006	0.204 0.009
agreeableness					-0.441 0		0.323 0	0.263 0.001	0.287 0	0.246 0.002
Neuroticism							-0.387 0	-0.370 0	-0.377 0	-0.366 0
Overall satisfaction							0.421 0	0.294 0	0.344 0	0.321 0
Dyadic consensus								0.609 0	0.641 0	0.641 0
Affectional expression									0.687 0	0.491 0
Dyadic satisfaction										0.644 0
Dyadic cohesion										

4. Discussion

As the results concluded, the research hypotheses based on the relationship between personality characteristics and mental divorce is largely confirmed. It can be abbreviated to the results expressed below:

1. There is positive correlation between Extraversion factor and marital satisfaction indexes (overall satisfaction Dyadic consensus, Affectional expression, Dyadic satisfaction and Dyadic cohesion). This means that with increasing a person's Extraversion, each of these indices will also increase.
2. There is positive correlation between openness to experience factor and all of the marital satisfaction indices. The increase in this factor leads to better marital relationship in each of indices.
3. There is a positive correlation among conscientiousness and all the factors of marital adjustment. More conscientious women are better in marital adjustment.
4. Positive correlation was observed between social agreeableness factor and all of the marital satisfaction indices.

5. Negative correlation was observed between neuroticism (nervousness) and all of the marital satisfaction indices. People who scored high on neuroticism, their marital satisfaction were less.

These results are in accord with the findings of previous research (Donnellan et al, 2004; Gattiset al, 2004; Luo et al, 2005) and are clarified according to the following probability:

Four of the Five-Factor personality characteristics showed significant meta-analytic associations with partner relationship satisfaction. These characteristics were lower neuroticism, higher agreeableness, higher conscientiousness and higher extraversion (Malouff et al, 2009). The longitudinal approach to predicting marital satisfaction has found low neuroticism to be an important predictor. In a review of longitudinal studies Karney and Bradbury (1995) reported that neuroticism was a substantial predictor of marital quality and stability.

Heller, Watson, and Iles (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of Five-Factor Model characteristics and self-rated marital satisfaction and found that all five characteristics had statistically significant correlations, with Neuroticism having the strongest relationship, with higher neuroticism being associated with self-rated marital satisfaction at $-.26$. Greater agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion and openness were associated with greater marital satisfaction at $.24$, $.22$, $.14$ and $.08$, respectively.

It should be noted that this study was carried out to investigate mental divorce and in order to lack of proper instrument, the score of mental divorce was deduced from low levels of marital satisfaction.

In addition to the results of response to hypotheses, other results were also obtained from the questionnaires that this case is:

- According to data collected, it has been estimated that female nurses are more extravert than housewives.
- Teachers were also significantly more extravert than housewives.
- In conscientiousness, women nurse and teachers obtained higher scores than housewives.
- Amount of Dyadic consensus and Dyadic cohesion of the teachers, were significantly more than housewives.
- In examining education level, the conclusion was deduced that MA graduates were significantly more extravert than lower levels and thus indirectly can have more marital satisfaction.
- In the review and analysis, this result was concluded that, in the overall satisfaction scale, the teachers were significantly more satisfied than the housewives.
- The education factor had a positive relationship with Dyadic consensus and higher education level lead to more consensuses.
- In couples without children, expressing affection was meaningfully and significantly more.
- Also better economic statuses lead to more affectional expression.
- Economic status factor, showed direct and positive correlation with dyadic satisfaction index. So that couples with a very good status showed the highest marital satisfaction. Also very good economic status has a direct relationship with dyadic cohesion.
- In the condition of housing, this was received that those who lived in their own house, had more social agreeableness than who lived in relative house.

In summary, the results of this research showed that personality traits can predict marital satisfaction. Hence, one can refer to two sets of practical and theoretical outcomes of current research. At a practical level, recognizing the personality traits of each other before marriage and training better kind of behavior to couples can lead to higher level of marital satisfaction. At the theoretical level, finding of the current research can confirm the current theories of personality traits and present new questions and hypotheses regarding the relationship of other kinds of variables and marital satisfaction.

Limitations related to the population of the research (females) and the kind of research (correlation), present limitations regarding the generalized, interpretations and cognitive reason documents of the variables, which should be taken into consideration. In addition, possible problems related to the validity of the study should not be ignored.

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