

MARITAL QUALITY AMONG FEMALE NEWLY-WEDS IN KLANG VALLEY: THE INFLUENCE OF MARITAL COMMUNICATION AND GENDER ROLE

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ABSTRACT

For centuries, factors influencing marital quality have always been the basic theme among researchers and academicians. As early years of marriage is said to be the most crucial time in married life, various internal and external factors have been seriously debated to ensure the quality of the marriage. Extensive studies have highlighted the importance of gender roles and communication in determining marital quality among newly-weds. This research however, highlighted on the impacts of these two variables on marital quality and focuses only on female newly-weds. Data were gathered from 288 Muslim women who have been married less than 2 years at the time of data collection. Self-administered questionnaires which governs "Dyadic Adjustment Scale", "Gender Role Attitude Scale", and the communication sub-scale of "The Three Couple Scale PREPARED/ENRICH: Marital Satisfaction, Communication and Conflict Resolution" were used in order to measure marital quality, gender role and marital communication among the respondents. Results from this study indicate that gender role and marital communication were significantly related with marital quality. In addition, marital communication is the strongest predictor of marital quality among the female newly-weds. In sum, effective communication is an essential tool to ensure the success of intimate relationship such as marriage.

Keywords: marital quality, newly-weds, marital communication, gender role

Introduction

Marital quality is referred to a subjective evaluation of individual's marital relationship and is often used interchangeably with marital satisfaction (Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Research around the world had highlighted the importance of marital quality. High quality marriage may lead to positive individual development (Fischer and Sousa-Poza, 2009), lower risk of depression (Kaur, Tee, Ariaratnam, Krishnapillai & China, 2013), lower mortality rate (Zheng & Thomas, 2013) and improve mental health conditions (Umberson, Williams, Powers, Liu, and Needham, 2006). Meanwhile, individuals who experienced negative life events are most likely experienced decrement of mental health level (Choi and Marks, 2008). The extensive literature shows the importance of well-functioning marriage that it helps to improve individual well-being. Besides, research on marital quality had become one of the important factors in the marriage research focus in the research field.

Early stage of marriage is often recognized as the most critical stage where adaptation occurs at its higher stage. In United States it is estimated that 25% of the newly-weds ends up in divorce within their first five years (Bramlet and Mosher, 2001). In addition to this, it is also estimated that around 40% to 50% of couples in United States will end up with separation (Amato, 2010; Cherlin, 2010). Aside of the reducing rates in marital quality, divorce has also become one of the common phenomenon not only in United States but also in Asian countries including Malaysia.

Malaysia recently had witnesses a constant increment in divorce cases especially among Muslim couples. The number of registered divorce cases also has increased from year to year. In 2012, the registered number of divorce cases had shown 17% of increment compared to year before (Malaysian Statistic Department, 2013). Given the fact that marriage is widely defined as a formal recognized union between a man and a women and roles of women in maintaining the success or failure of a marriage, thus it is important to highlight factors that affect the marital quality of newly-weds Muslims wives. In addition, forming and maintaining stable and satisfied marriage as well as developing empirical interventions for married couples also can prevent marital disruptions (Silverstain, 2012). Therefore, a better understanding of the factors that influence marital quality is essential.

Existing research examining on marital quality has shown the importance of interaction skills between partners (Bradbury and Karney, 2004). Past research had highlighted the importance of people who communicate successfully. Dysfunctional communications always lead to relationships issues where couples who had great communication will have fewer conflicts. (Sadeghi, Hazedastan, Ahmadi, Bahrami, Etemadi, & Fatehzadeh, 2011). According to Islam, husband and wife should always communicate politely and be respectful to each other. As Prophet Muhammad PBUH said,

“Any woman who converses indignantly with her husband, thereby hurting his feelings, none of her deeds or act of worship will be accepted from her until and unless her husband does not express his satisfaction with her. Similar will be the fate of the husband who deny the rights of his wife”. (The hadith, n.d).

Apart from that, the narrated hadith also stresses on Muslim women way of communication with their husbands. In regards to that, a wife should communicate politely with her husband where hurting his feeling causes her act of worship will not be accepted by God and vice versa.

Hamidah (2008) indicated that, 693 respondents from eight districts in Johor, Malaysia, concluded that communication has become the second major cause of marital breakdown. However, research on communications does not only focus on verbal communication but also non-verbal communications. Smith, Vogel, Madon and Edward (2011) in their study involving 67 married heterosexual couples indicated that, when a topic discussed were chosen by wives, they exhibited more touches, while no difference were found if the topic was chosen by husband. Given the extensive evidence on the importance of marital communication in marriage and among wives, it is important to look upon the influence of marital communication

In addition to that, gender role had become one of the prominent issues among married women. Gender roles refer to the perception that was built within the society in two ideologies; masculine or feminisim (Walzer, 2008). In marriage, gender role is often being officiate with two type of behaviour, 1) traditional beliefs: individuals who look the role of women and men as had been defined by norm and culture such as women should remain as housewives, or working women should still do the housework and 2) egalitarian beliefs: where individuals who possesses this believes emphasizes on the equality of households and sharing housework.

Amato, Booth and Johnson (2003) emphasized that majority of American husband believe that they should share the role together and dependent with each other. From this study, they also emphasized that working wife should play their role as wife and mother but husband should also share the household. This study also concluded that egalitarian wives will always hope that their husband will help them with their household. Zhang (2015) in their research among the Chinese wives in China also found out that traditional breadwinner role attitudes were found to associate positively with marital happiness.

Previous research also emphasized the important roles of gender roles in determining marital quality (Helms, Walls, Crouter, & McHale, 2010). Interactions of wives attitudes are also said to become one of the factors that determine husband marital quality (Falconier, 2013). However, this research will look deeper on the effects of wife's gender role to their own marital quality. Few similar research focusing on the newly-weds that have been conducted suggested few factors that may lead to marital quality among the newly-weds. Giving the role of women in this global area is abreast with men, it is important to ensure the role of women and men in marriage is defined well to avoid conflicts which lead to marital disruptions.

Looking at the unhealthy trend of divorce and the importance of adjustments among the Muslim newly-weds, it seems that there is a need in conducting research on this target population. Family developmental theorist emphasized that family institution is defined differently based on social norms and ethnicity (White & Klein, 2008). Thus, this study was conducted to determine the relationship between marital communication, gender role and marital quality among women Muslims Newly-weds in Klang Valley. In summary, this study had addressed two research questions;-

- 1) Are there significant relationships between marital communication, gender role and marital quality?
- 3) What are the unique factors that influence marital quality among women Muslim newlyweds in Klang Valley?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a descriptive and correlational research design in order to explore factors affecting marital quality among Muslim newly-weds in Klang Valley. This research utilized quantitative research approach and was cross-sectional in nature which involves only short period of time in gathering data.

This research was conducted in the Klang Valley, Malaysia which focuses in Hulu Langat, Ampang Jaya, Subang Jaya and Petaling Jaya District, Putrajaya, And Kuala Lumpur. Data were gathered from a larger study, evaluating marital quality among Newly Weds who had been married less than 2 years. Respondents of this study must fit certain criteria stated in this project. The criteria of the respondents are;

1. Respondents must be a Muslim
2. Respondents must be married no more than 24 months at the time of data collections
3. Respondents must reside in Klang Valley at the time of data collections
4. Not a polygamous marriage
5. Current marriage is the first marriage.

MEASURES

Three assessments, (a) Dyadic Adjustment Scale [DAS] (Spanier, 1976); (b) The Three Couple Scale for Marital Satisfaction, Communication and Conflict Resolution (Olson & Larson, 2008); (c) Gender Role Attitude Scale (Amato & Booth, 1994), and (d) demographic questionnaire were administered.

Marital Quality

Marital Quality – Dyadic Adjustment Scale [DAS] (Spanier, 1976). DAS included four subscales: a) Dyadic Consensus; b) Dyadic Satisfaction; c) Dyadic Cohesion; and d) Affectional Expression. This measurement consists of 32 items. High score indicate high marital quality. The instrument was reliable with a Cronbach’s α of 0.84 for this study.

Marital Communication

Marital Communication was measured using *Enriching and Nurturing Relationship : The Three Couple Scale for Marital Satisfaction, Communication and Conflict Resolution (Olson & Larson, 2008)*. Marital communication measurement consists of 10 items, with three negative items. As other measurement, this measurement uses 5-point likert scale. The score for this measurement range from 10 – 50 where high score indicates effective communications while low score indicates that the couple have less effective communications.

Gender Role

Gender Role Attitude Scale (Booth & Amato, 2001) was used to measure gender role for this study. This instrument measured the role according to gender with 7 items. This instrument uses 5 Likert Scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Respondent who obtain higher score indicates an egalitarian belief while low scores indicates more traditional value. This instrument was reliable with the Cronbach’s α of 0.89 for this study. Examples of the question were “Wife’s role is to take care of the children” and “Husband should not feel disturbed if his wife’s jobs needed her to be apart from home”.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Respondents’ background information

Background variable	M	SD	Min	Max
Personal Characteristic				
Age	26.35	2.37	19	35
Education				
No formal education	1 (0.3)			
Junior high school (PMR)	2 (0.7)			
Senior high school (SPM)	52 (18.1)			
Form 6 (STPM)	6 (2.1)			
Certificate	25 (8.7)			
Diploma	54 (18.8)			
Degree	136 (47.2)			
Master	11 (3.8)			
PhD	1 (0.3)			
Individual Income (RM)	1734.00	1243.44	0	6180

Table 1 shows personal information of the respondents. A total of 288 respondents consists of newly-wed Muslim women were recruited in this study. The respondents’ age ranged are between 19 years old to 35 years old, with mean of 26.35; SD = 2.37. Majority of the respondents age is below 30 (93.45%) and only 6.6% of the respondents were above 30 years.

As for education, about 47.2% of the respondents had obtained a degree while 18.8% of the respondents had studied until diploma level, 18.1% had stopped their study until SPM, 8.7% had received certificate, 3.8% had received their Master, and 2.1% had studied until STPM. Meanwhile, only two individual studied until PMR level, only one individual have received PhD and one had received no formal education.

Respondents’ education was presented by level of education they received. Majority of respondents have at least their first degree. Only one respondent did not receive any formal education and PhD respectively. Descriptive analysis on individual income shows that the average individual income is RM 1734 (SD = 1243.44) with the maximum income is RM 6180. The analysis of the income shows that majority of the women comes from the low income family.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondent by Categories of Variables (n=288)

Variable	n (%)	Mean	Sd.	Min	Max
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Gender Role (n=288)		28.71	3.87	12	35
Low (≤ 28.71)	135 (46.9)				
High (> 28.71)	153 (53.1)				
Marital Communication (n=288)		36.77	6.99	12	50
Very high (41-50)					
High (35-40)	105 (36.5)				
Medium (28-34)	71 (24.7)				
Low (23-27)	84 (29.2)				
Very Low (10-22)	23 (8)				
	5 (1.7)				
Marital Quality (n=288)		50	10	14.49	70.64
Low (≤ 40)	33 (11.5)				
High (> 40)	255 (88.5)				

Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis of variables that were measured in this study. Marital quality was measured using Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) which consists of 32 items. Spanier (1976) explained that, individuals who scores below 40 were still having adjustment issues in their marriage but does not necessary need clinical interventions. Using 40 as the cut of point, result for marital quality shows that 88.5% of the respondents reported to have high marital quality. This indicates that majority of the wives tend to have satisfied marriage. However, a small number of respondents 11.5% reported that they are not very satisfied with their marriage.

Descriptive analysis of this study also shows that 105 (36.5%) of the respondents reported that they communicate effectively with their partner. They tend to satisfy with the way they communicate with their spouse. However, there are 28 (9.7%) of the respondents reported to scores low in marital communication which shows that they are not satisfied with the way they communicate with their spouse.

As shown in Table 2, 50.5% reported to have higher egalitarian belief the average score is 28.71 (SD = 3.87). Using Gender Role Attitude Scale (Booth & Amato, 2001), this measurement measures believes that an individual possess regarding the role of husband and wife in marriage. Therefore, this study concluded that 153 (53.1%) of the respondents believed in egalitarian roles.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Results for Relationships between Gender Role, Marital Communication and Marital Quality

Variables	Marital Quality (r)
Age	0.017
Respondents' education	0.161**
Income	0.050
Gender Role	0.294**
Marital Communication	0.386**

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$

Pearson correlation analysis were run in order to test the significant relationship between factors that affect marital quality among newly-weds women. Age and income were found not to be related with marital quality. Meanwhile, education $r = 0.161$ ($p > 0.01$), gender role ($r = 0.294$, $p < 0.01$) and marital communication ($r = 0.386$, $p > 0.01$) show positive significant relationship with marital quality.

Table 4: Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis on the Predictors of Marital Quality

Variables	β	t	Sig.
Education	0.089	1.662	0.098
Gender Role	0.217	4.004	0.000
Communication	0.328	6.005	0.000
$R^2 = 0.205$ $F = 24.35$ $Df = (3,284)$			

A multiple regression analysis (MRA) was performed in order to determine the unique predictor of marital quality. Marital communication, gender roles and education were regressed against marital quality. Analysis indicated that only two factors significantly explained 20.5% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.205$, $F = 24.35^{***}$, $p \leq 0.001$) where marital communication significantly predicted marital quality ($\beta = 0.328^{***}$, $p < 0.001$).

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relationships between gender role, marital communication and marital quality among women Muslim newly-weds and addresses two research questions. Result from this study shows that most of the newly-wed women tend to be satisfied with their marriage within their 2 years of marriage. This study is almost equivalent to the findings from Beach, Fincham, Amir and Leonard (2005) where 80% of the couples were found to be satisfied 2 years after marriage and 20% reported dissatisfaction in their marriage.

Result from this study also answers the research questions where marital communication plays a vital role in predicting marital quality among Muslim wives. Communication within family is important as it permits wives to deliver their needs and concerns on other family members. Through communication, women are allowed to discuss and solve their problems together. Thus open communication helps in promoting healthy environment within the marriage institution. However, if wives were found to communicate ineffectively, it may result them to be dealing with mental distress, divorcers and violence (Cordova, 2011). Besides that this study also revealed that, communication is not just important in the Western countries but also important in Malaysia and other countries. Data gathered from 358 bank customers in two different nations, Malaysia and New Zealand shows that communication is significantly related with relationship quality for both countries (Ndubisi, Khoo Lattimore, Yang, & Capel, 2011).

Results from the Pearson analysis on gender role and marital quality also shows that, gender role plays an important role in determining marital quality. A great economic demand had lead women to violate the traditional sex-type role expectations which discourage wives employment where their roles as housewives had also been challenged (Baker, 2004). Results from this study shows that, majority of the women tend to have egalitarian belief where their expectations on their roles are also changed. Results from another study conducted by Taniguchi and Kaufman (2013) also shows that Since they are sharing the same burden to support the family, they expected husband to share the same house chores, which later resulted in declining marital quality among wives if this expectation were unmet.

Results from this study also concluded that, marital communication had plays the most significant role in determining marital quality among newly-weds Muslim wives. Given that early years of marriage had become the most critical period where a lot of adjustment had taken into places, it is important for the wives to communicate any of their issues well so that they could maintain a quality and satisfied marriage.

Conclusion

It is important to note that the limitation of this study is that the sample is taken only from one state in Malaysia, thus results of this study may not be generalized to represent the whole newly-weds Muslim in Malaysia. Future research using wider samples from different culture including different states in Malaysia should be conducted in order to get a full picture of marital quality among wives in Malaysia. Overall, this study reveals gender role and marital quality had significant relationships with marital quality. It can be concluded that communication had plays the most important functions in determining marital quality among the wives. Given the fact that marital communication is the most prominent component in marital quality, future intervention programmes in Malaysia should be focusing on promoting good communication among Muslim wives in Malaysia which was proven to be helpful in maintaining marital quality.

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