

Original research

Phenomenological explanation of women's lived experience of marital happiness

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Abstract

Introduction: Considering that lived experience is one of the traditions of qualitative research that emphasizes the internal experience of individuals, this study was conducted with the aim of explaining women's lived experience of marital happiness phenomenologically.

Research Method: In this study, a qualitative descriptive phenomenological method was used. The participants of the study were 15 married women aged 23 to 39 in Kashan city and Ordibehesht 1403 who had a high marital happiness score from the marital happiness questionnaire. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the 7-step Claise method.

Findings: The results indicated the extraction of 3 main themes and 17 sub-themes. The main themes are (1) family factors (1- family satisfaction, 2- economic equality, 3- cultural/religious similarities, 4- family support, 5- non-interference; (2) interpersonal skills (1- interest, 2- compatibility/understanding/mutual understanding, 3- respect, 4- verbal communication, 5- cooperation at home, 6- history, 7- expression of affection, 8- honesty and trust), (3) contextual factors (1- same age/small age difference, 2- education, 3- presence of children, 4- economic well-being) which were examined in detail in the study.

Conclusion: According to the results, it was determined that various factors play a role in creating marital happiness and the results of this study can be used to improve the quality of relationships between couples. Also, psychologists and family counselors can use the findings of this study to reduce problems between couples.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Lived Experience, Marital happiness, Women

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Introduction:

The necessity of strengthening family life, its stability and durability depends on the attitude and interaction of couples with each other; one of the most important factors affecting the stability and positive attitude of couples towards each other is the existence of marital happiness. (1) .Johnson and Wu defined marital happiness as the level of individual satisfaction or happiness that a person feels about their marriage. Marital happiness is one of the most important predictors of marital adjustment and a powerful indicator of the quality of life together, and it is one of the most important components of the quality of couples' relationships. Marital happiness also reflects the mental dimensions of the quality of marital relationships and is synonymous with psychological well-being in positive psychology (2). According to Amato, the concept of marital happiness is sometimes used instead of marital satisfaction and is often combined in the definition of quality of life. Because this distinction is often vague, it is necessary to separate the concepts of marital quality and happiness and other related variables; Marital satisfaction is conceptualized as a basic need or desire that is satisfied in a relationship, while marital happiness is expressed as a feeling of pleasure or joy that is achieved by being in a relationship (3). Research by Raur, Saby, Proulx, and Welling found that people with higher levels of marital happiness spend more free time with their spouses and report higher levels of job satisfaction. In addition, it was found that happy couples use more problem-solving skills and have a more positive attitude toward each other(4), while unhappy couples use blame, humiliation, insults, and withdrawal during conflict and have a pessimistic attitude toward each other. Happy couples also have higher physical and mental health because they support each other more (5). A study conducted in the United States of America indicated that the prevalence of marital happiness among couples aged 20 to 55 was 30 percent (6). By examining the aforementioned studies, it can be seen that the important role of the marital happiness component in improving relationships between couples and reducing conflicts between them. On the other hand, quantitative research has also investigated the effective and contributing factors in the formation or improvement of marital happiness (7). The use of positive mindfulness training, behavioral-communicative group therapy, emotion-focused group couple therapy, emotion-focused therapy, positive couple therapy, positive group training, spirituality training with an emphasis on Islamic teachings, positive group psychotherapy (8), and relationship enrichment training are among the educational and therapeutic programs that have been carried out so far in the field of increasing marital happiness. In addition, spiritual intelligence and cognitive regulation of emotion, the ability to receive and send messages, self-compassion, listening, emotional control, and assertive communication are among the variables that predict the formation of marital happiness. Sandhya, in her only qualitative study, states that in Indian participants, socio-economic class(9), family structure, type of arranged and love marriages, the presence of empathy, agreement, and support are the factors that lay the foundation for marital happiness(10). It seems that more qualitative research is needed to better and more deeply understand the factors affecting marital happiness of couples, because identifying the factors affecting marital happiness will only be possible comprehensively when the researcher provides the basis for in-depth dialogue with them. During these conversations, after establishing

interpersonal trust, the researcher tries to identify the factors affecting marital happiness by carefully analyzing the couples' lived experiences (11). On the other hand, given that the perception of happiness is subjective and internal (12). In the case of cooperation, it is possible to benefit from using lived experience as one of the traditions of qualitative research that emphasizes the internal experience of individuals. Therefore, the present study seeks to answer the question: What are the most important factors that create marital happiness from the perspective of women?

Research Method:

The present study is a qualitative phenomenological study in nature. Marital happiness is a multidimensional concept and different people have different views and attitudes towards this concept and the factors affecting it, therefore, the researchers chose the above method in this study. The study population was married women in Kashan city in Ordibehesht 1403 who, according to the Azarian Happiness Questionnaire (1973), had a high and desirable happiness experience. (Score higher than 56 based on the cutoff point announced by the manufacturer)(13). Therefore, obtaining the minimum required score in the questionnaire, at least 5 years since the start of cohabitation, and consent to participate in the research were considered as the entry criteria for the study, and failure to fully answer the questions and short answers were considered as the exit criteria. Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The interviews were conducted by the researchers in the present study, in coordination with a family counseling center in Kashan city, in one of the rooms, and with the necessary arrangements made to create a calm and favorable atmosphere with the presence of women. The present study is a qualitative phenomenological study in nature. Marital happiness is a multidimensional concept and different people have different views and attitudes towards this concept and the factors affecting it, therefore, the researchers chose the above method in this study. The study population was married women in Kashan city in Ordibehesht 1403 who, according to the Azarian Happiness Questionnaire (1973), had a high and desirable happiness experience. (Score higher than 56 based on the cutoff point announced by the manufacturer) (13). Therefore, obtaining the minimum required score in the questionnaire, at least 5 years since the start of cohabitation, and consent to participate in the research were considered as the entry criteria for the study, and failure to fully answer the questions and short answers were considered as the exit criteria. Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The interviews were conducted by the researchers in the present study, in coordination with a family counseling center in Kashan city, in one of the rooms, and with the necessary arrangements made to create a calm and favorable atmosphere with the presence of women.

Table of extracted main and secondary themes

Sub-theme	Main contents
Family satisfaction	Family factors

Economic equality	
Cultural/religious commonalities	
Family support	
Non-interference	
Interest	Interpersonal skills
Compatibility / Understanding / Mutual Understanding	
Respect	
Verbal Communication	
Cooperation at Home	
Forgiveness	
Expression of Affection	
Honesty and Trust	
Same age/small age gap	Background factors
Education	
Having children	
Economic well-being	

Discussion and conclusion:

The present study was conducted with the aim of explaining women's lived experience of marital happiness in a phenomenological manner and was indirectly consistent with the findings of Abedini et al., Galambos et al., Yadava et al., Rajaei et al., and with the findings of Nowrozi and Sadyana's research. The results of the present study showed that marital happiness from the perspective of married women was analyzed in 3 main themes and 17 sub-themes. The findings were organized in three main themes: family factors, interpersonal skills, and contextual factors. One of the limitations of the present study is the lack of men in the study. Since it has been mentioned in numerous studies that marital satisfaction is higher in men than in women, it is likely that men's views on the topic of marital happiness are also different from women's, given that the results of qualitative research have less generalizability than quantitative research, so this is

considered another limitation of the present study. Therefore, it is suggested that in future research, this category should be given special attention from the perspective of men, and it is also recommended to use an educational program for premarital counseling and couples therapy to improve the quality of couples' relationships for a life of greater satisfaction and happiness.

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Conflict of Interest: The findings of this study do not have any conflict of personal or organizational interests.

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