The Mediating Role of Romantic Jealousy in Relation to Attachment Styles and Marital Quality in Women

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Abstract: The aim of the present study was to examine the mediating role of romantic jealousy in relation to marital quality and attachment styles in women in Isfahan. In this descriptive-correlational study, statistical population included all married women in Isfahan between winter and spring 2015. A sample of 195 women was examined who were selected through convenience sampling. Golombok-Rust Inventory of Marital State, Adult Attachment Questionnaire, and Multiple Jealousy Scale were used as the research instruments. Pearson correlation coefficient and hierarchical regression analysis in SPSS 21 software were used in order to analyze the data. The results showed that the attachment styles were significantly correlated with marital quality and romantic jealousy (p<0.01). The results of hierarchical regression analysis showed that dimensions of romantic jealousy played the role of mediation variable in the association between attachment styles and marital quality (p<0.01). Therefore, based on the obtained results, the association between attachment styles and marital quality is not as simple as a linear correlation and could be affected by romantic jealousy.

Keywords: marital quality, attachment style, romantic jealousy, women

I. Introduction

Quality of life is a multidimensional concept affected by time, place, and individual and social values. One of the areas of life quality is marital quality. Although the researches which have done so far have found that marriage can result in mental and physical well-being [1], it is the “quality” of the marriage that leads to these benefits [2]. Recent research studies have identified several factors associated with marital quality, such as personality traits and attachment styles. The link between “better” or “worse” marriages has been a subject of much empirical interest over the last half-century. During this period, marriage went through considerable socio-demographic transformations, including a declining marriage rate, increasing age of first marriage and increasing divorce rates during these years [3], [4]. In spite of the changes in the demographics and meanings of marriage, the impact of marital quality on mental well-being has remained a topic of consistent interest among scholars, practitioners, and the public. Marital quality is defined as a global evaluation of the marriage along several dimensions [5], including positive and negative aspects of marriage (e.g., support and strain [6]), attitudes, and reports of behaviors and interaction patterns [7]. Thus, high marital quality is typically operationally defined by high self-reported satisfaction with the relationship, predominantly positive attitudes towards one’s partner, and low levels of hostile and negative behavior. Marital distress has both concurrent and longitudinal associations with psychological distress [8]. In addition, marital problems predict the onset of psychopathology [9].

There are many influential factors in marital quality, such as couples’ attachment styles. Researchers have identified three main “styles” of adult attachment which impact how individuals perceive and respond to intimacy: secure, anxious, and avoidant. Individuals with secure attachment are those who feel comfortable with intimacy and are usually warm and affectionate towards others. These individuals do not often worry about being abandoned by their partners [10], and they express more adaptive functioning in romantic relationships compared to individuals who are insecure [11]. By contrast, anxiously attached adults are described as worried about being rejected or abandoned by their romantic partners, and they crave intimacy and closeness [10]. Finally, avoidant adults express independence from their romantic partner by constant attempt to minimize closeness and intimacy. They are less invested in their relationships, and they consistently try to remain psychologically and emotionally independent of their partners [12]. One of the other factors directly affecting marital quality is romantic jealousy. A common thread among most definitions of jealousy is that it is an emotional response to the real or imagined threat of losing something of value from a romantic relationship which includes affective, cognitive and behavioral components [13].
Jealousy is commonly experienced in most romances [14]. Jealousy is a complex emotion that is considered to have mainly negative qualities. According to Berscheid’s Emotion-in-Relationships conceptual model [15], jealousy is a natural and expected consequence of a situation in which a close relationship is threatened. From this perspective, jealousy need not be viewed so negatively when it is as a justifiable emotional response to potentially losing a valued relationship [16]. White and Muller [17] suggested that jealousy is most closely associated with the love style of “mania,” which is characterized by uncertainty about the partner’s love and by extreme emotional reactions often in an obsessive fashion. On the other hand, considering jealousy as a protective response to relationship threat coincides with the evolutionary psychological perspective on relationships. From this viewpoint, romantic jealousy is an adaptive emotion that is necessary to aid those who are in danger of losing their relationship partner to a rival and thus must act to prevent the potential loss of their partner’s sexual reproductive benefits [18]. The excessive state of jealousy lead to indicate overreaction and this situation can severely hurt the relationship. It causes the couple to feel instability, vigilance, and worry [19]. On the other part, attachment style correlated with jealousy via anxiety, support, intimacy, and closeness regulation [20]. Romantic jealousy and attachment share some characteristics; both can be interpreted as dynamics aimed at maintaining the subjects/partners together, appear to be triggered by the separation from the attachment figure/partner, involve the same basic emotions, such as fear, anger, sadness, and, finally, both elicit a sense of safety when the other is close and responsive, or the opposite when he or she is distant [21]. Dandurand and Lafontaine [22] and Attridge [16] concluded that jealousy was negatively correlated with marital quality and also that attachment styles influenced on the relationship between jealousy and couples marital quality. This study, in accordance with literature, examines the mediating role of romantic jealousy in relation to attachment styles and marital quality. The attempts to become aware of the mediating factors related to marital quality will assist the researchers to progress their goal in maximizing marital quality. On the other hand, it is probable that in different cultures, attachment styles would be variously presented. Therefore, the mediating role of romantic jealousy in the relationship between attachment styles and marital quality would be worth noting to be studied in the Iranian culture. Due to the lack of researches in this area in Iran, this study could approximately fulfill the research gap and practically leading to next researches and psychotherapies.

II. Method

The present study used a descriptive-correlational method. Statistical population included all married women in Isfahan between winter and spring 2015. According to Gall, Borg, and Gall [23], a sample of 140 women was determined. With regard to the panel attrition, 200 women were selected through convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria consisted of signing informed consent, having 18-45 years old, being married up to 10 years, having at least the junior high school education, and no asking for divorce at the moment. After explaining the purposes of the study, and emphasizing on confidentiality of information, participants were asked to complete the questionnaires. They were permitted to finish their cooperation in any step of the study. Finally, five individuals were excluded from statistical analysis because of incomplete responses to the scales. Thus, the final sample reduced to 195 individuals (mean age: 28 years old; age range: 19-43 years; SD: 4.97; mean length of marriage: 4.2 years; SD: 4.97). The Pearson correlation coefficient and hierarchical regression analysis in SPSS software, version 21, were used for data analysis.

III. Measurements

Golombok-Rust Inventory of Marital State (GRIMS)

The GRIMS was formulated by NFER-Nelson in 1988, and revised by Golombok and Rust in 2007 [24]. The GRIMS assesses the quality of the relationship between a married or cohabiting couple. The GRIMS is a 28-item questionnaire, scored between 0-3 for each item. Each item is scored on a 4-point scale (completely disagree, disagree, agree, completely agree), thus the total score is fluctuating between 0-84. In this inventory, high score indicates the poor marital quality; hence the more the score, the less the marital quality. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the questionnaire was reported as 0.85 for men and 0.89 for women by Golombok and Rust [24]. Milne [25] reported its Cronbach’s alpha coefficient in range of 0.81 to 0.94 and high content validity and construct validity as well. In Persian version of this questionnaire, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient has been calculated as 0.89 for men and 0.91 for women [26].

Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ)

The AAQ is a 15-item questionnaire, derived from attachment theory of Bowlby. It was formulated by Hazan and Shaver in 1987. The AAQ consists of three subscales including Secure Attachment Style, Avoidant Attachment Style, and Ambivalent Attachment Style. Each of these subscales has 5 items. Each item is scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the AAQ was reported as 0.70 by Feeney and Noller [27]. In its Persian version, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was evaluated by Behzadipour, Pakdaman, and Besharat [28] in a sample of 30 participants. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient has been calculated as 0.75 for men and 0.85 for women [29].
coefficients were calculated as 0.92, 0.93, and 0.89 for secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment styles, respectively.

**Multiple Jealousy Scale (MJS)**

Pfeiffer and Wong [29] propose a view of jealousy as a multidimensional construct, compounding cognitive, emotional and behavioral domains. The authors created the Multiple Jealousy Scale. Each subscale consists 8 item. Each item is scored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7. Attridge [16] reported its Cronbach’s alpha coefficient 0.84, 0.88, and 0.82 respectively for emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects. In Persian version in the present study, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient has been calculated as 0.90 for the total scale and 0.88, 0.94, and 0.79 for cognitive, emotional, and behavioral, respectively.

**IV. Results**

Descriptive statistics of the measured variables in this study is presented in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant attachment</td>
<td>12.12</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure attachment</td>
<td>16.39</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious/ambivalent attachment</td>
<td>10.96</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love for partner</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rightness of relationship</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being loved</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital quality</td>
<td>25.98</td>
<td>12.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A summary of the results of covariance matrix of the research variables is demonstrated in table 2.

**Table 2- correlation coefficients of dimensions of attachment styles, romantic jealousy, and marital quality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant attachment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure attachment</td>
<td>-0.352**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious/ambivalent attachment</td>
<td>0.363**</td>
<td>-0.091</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive jealousy</td>
<td>0.244**</td>
<td>-0.186**</td>
<td>0.335**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional jealousy</td>
<td>0.188**</td>
<td>-0.088</td>
<td>0.205**</td>
<td>0.247**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral jealousy</td>
<td>0.395**</td>
<td>-0.144*</td>
<td>0.482**</td>
<td>0.663**</td>
<td>0.419**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital quality</td>
<td>0.327**</td>
<td>-0.264**</td>
<td>0.313**</td>
<td>0.496**</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.485**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<0.01**

**p<0.05**

Based on the data of table 2 and regarding that in GRIMS questionnaire high score is the sign of poor marital quality, the triple dimensions of attachment styles is significantly correlated with marital quality. Furthermore, cognitive and behavioral dimensions of romantic jealousy have positive significant correlation with marital quality. In addition, the triple dimensions of attachment styles are significantly correlated with triple dimensions of romantic jealousy except emotional jealousy and secure attachment style.

The results of hierarchical regression analysis are illustrated in table 3 in order to examine the mediating role of romantic jealousy dimensions in relation to attachment styles and marital quality.

**Table 3- the results of hierarchical regression analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>step</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>sig</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>R2A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Avoidant attachment</td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td>3.011</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.422</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>0.178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secure attachment</td>
<td>-0.183</td>
<td>-2.988</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxious/ambivalent attachment</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>4.014</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Avoidant attachment</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>2.421</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.614</td>
<td>0.401</td>
<td>0.223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secure attachment</td>
<td>-0.143</td>
<td>-2.765</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxious/ambivalent attachment</td>
<td>0.156</td>
<td>2.994</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive jealousy</td>
<td>0.279</td>
<td>4.335</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional jealousy</td>
<td>-0.170</td>
<td>-3.225</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavioral jealousy</td>
<td>0.275</td>
<td>3.692</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in table 3, the results of hierarchical regression analysis demonstrate that the dimensions of attachment styles solely explain 18% of marital quality variance in the first step. In the second step, attachment styles and romantic jealousy dimensions totally explain 40% of marital quality variance. The entrance of romantic jealousy in regression equation increases the regression coefficient.

The following conditions should be met if a variable plays a mediating role:
1. There is a significant correlation between the mediating factor and the independent variable.
2. There is a significant correlation between the mediating factor and the dependent variable.
3. The correlation between the dependent and independent variables is weakened in case the mediating factor is applied [30].

In the present study, romantic jealousy (mediating variable) is significantly correlated with attachment styles (independent variable) and marital quality (dependent variable), (P<0.05). In the first step, Beta coefficient is significant for attachment styles. After the entrance of romantic jealousy in the second step, Beta coefficient in the former step has decreased. These results indicate that romantic jealousy could strongly influence the relationship between attachment styles and marital quality as a mediating variable.

The standard direct and indirect effects (regression weights) of the attachment styles on marital quality with regard to the mediating role of romantic jealousy are listed in Table 4.

Table 4- standard direct and indirect effects (regression weights) of the attachment styles on marital quality with regard to the mediating role of romantic jealousy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Direct effect</th>
<th>Indirect effect</th>
<th>Total effect</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant attachment</td>
<td>Marital quality</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure attachment</td>
<td>Marital quality</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious/ambivalent attachment</td>
<td>Marital quality</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on data of Table 4, indirect effect coefficient of avoidant attachment on marital quality regarding the mediating role of romantic jealousy is 0.11. Also, indirect effect coefficient of secure attachment on marital quality regarding the mediating role of romantic jealousy is -0.19. Moreover, indirect effect coefficient of ambivalent attachment on marital quality is 0.24 regarding the mediating role of romantic jealousy. These effect coefficients are all statistically significant (P<0.01). Therefore, there is a significant correlation between attachment styles and marital quality regarding the mediating role of romantic jealousy.

V. Discussion

This study examined the mediating role of three components of romantic jealousy, i.e., cognitive, emotional, and behavioral, over the impact of early attachment styles on the marital quality. The findings of this study provide some support for the hypothesized relationship between early attachment and marital satisfaction by mediating role of romantic jealousy. The results of the study showed that secure attachment was positively correlated with marital quality, and avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles were negatively correlated with marital quality. These findings are compatible with those of the studies accomplished by Awuah (31) and Saavedra, Chapman, and Rogge [32]. These results are explained by several arguments. According to Bartholomew and Horowitz [33], main distresses in marital life are originated from negative affection and attachment pathologies. The theoretical foundation of Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFT) is based on attachment as a conceptual means of describing and predicting adult love relationships with the assumption that the quality of romantic relationships is largely dependent upon the type of attachment between partners. EFT suggests that the security of attachment is strengthened when individuals experience their relationship as safe, and such safety enables them to deepen their emotional interactions [34], [35].

The couples with avoidant attachment style feel discomfort and annoyance in intimate and close relationships and they are unable to share their thoughts and feelings with others. Individuals with ambivalent attachment style have also a little ability to make intimate relationships. These individuals mainly need to make intimate relationships, but they have a little ability to make efficient communications, because they are afraid of being abandoned.

On the other hand, the findings showed that romantic jealousy was negatively correlated with marital quality. This outcome is in accordance with the former studies’ findings [16], [22].

Cognitive jealousy is a cognitive component and it implies frequency of a person’s suspicions and worries regarding partner interest in a rival, and interest received from a rival. Pursuant these suspicions, person is trapped in the ruminations about the past and worries about the feature leading to the reduction of the marital quality [36]. Behavioral jealousy evaluate the frequency with which a person engages in detective and protective behaviors, such as repetitive questioning, checking the phone and surveillance of their partner. It is given that one of the most important axis in the relationship is to respect the spouse privacy. These annoying behaviors lead to the feeling of being spied, suspected and disrespected [37].

In the present study, emotional jealousy was not significantly correlated with marital quality. These results are explained by several arguments. Emotional jealousy refer to the degree of upset a person experiences when exposed to jealousy-evoking situations. Jealousy is an emotion and it implies emotional and affectational reactions such as anger and discomfort. Considering the ability of women in expressing their emotions [38], it may be possible that in the stimulant situations (such as talking to the other woman), women express much emotional reactions that does not related to the marital quality and it is only feminine sensitivity. Furthermore, women consider these sensitivities as care, affection, love and passion.
In addition, people with insecure attachment styles are always afraid of being abandoned [39] and as mentioned, jealousy is rooted in the fear of abandonment and losing [40]. Finally, this defect cycle noticeably reduces marital quality. So, it could be discussed that attachment styles influence marital quality through romantic jealousy. It should be noted that the present study restricted to married women and hence, precautions should be taken to generalize its results to men and other community members. Therefore, similar researches on the other populations in the society are required for a general conclusion.

VI. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the relationship between attachment styles and marital quality is not as simple as a linear relationship, and it could be influenced by romantic jealousy. These results highlight the determining role of various psychological factors in decreasing or increasing marital quality.

VII. Acknowledgments

It is necessary to appreciate all of the individuals who assisted the authors as well as the participants cooperated with researchers in this study.

VIII. References


