

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Sexual Satisfaction and Related Factors among Iranian Married Women, 2017

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Sexual satisfaction is one of the important factors in marital satisfaction that affects couples' health and quality of life. The aim of this study was to determine sexual satisfaction and its related factors among married women in Shahroud, northeast of Iran. **Methods:** This cross-sectional study was conducted in 2017 and 500 married women were evaluated using Larson Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire. The data were analyzed using chi-square, one-way ANOVA and a multiple regression model. **Results:** The mean age of the participants was 32.8 (SD= 8.7) years, and the length of the marriage was 11.05 (SD= 9.1). Among the participants, 4.4% (N=22) had low sexual satisfaction; 37.8% (N=189) had moderate satisfaction. The bivariate analysis showed significant relationships between sexual satisfaction and variables including age, husband's age, length of marriage, number of children, education, husband's education and income ($p<0.001$). The regression analysis also indicated significant relationships between sexual satisfaction and education ($P=0.006$), length of the marriage ($P<0.001$) and income ($P=0.005$). **Conclusion:** Socio-economic variables such as education and income are among the main factors related to sexual satisfaction. However, counseling couples on sexual issues after marriage can help improve their sexual satisfaction.

Keywords: Orgasm, Sexual Behavior, Women, Marriage

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INTRODUCTION

Marital relationship is described as the most important and fundamental human relationship because it provides the basic structure for building a family relationship and educating the next generation (1, 2). This relationship is important for most couples and is considered a private topic. Sexual satisfaction is defined as the judgment each individual has of his or her sexual behavior and how enjoyable it is (3, 4) and is divided into two forms of satisfaction with sexual activity and emotional satisfaction (5). Sexual satisfaction is pivotal in marital satisfaction, and affects the health and quality of life of couples (2, 6) and is closely related to the health of the human and his community. If the sexual relationship between couples is not satisfactory, it can lead to frustration, deprivation, lack of security and reduced mental health, thereby reducing the marital satisfaction of couples and disrupting the family (2, 6, 7). Satisfaction with the

marital relationship makes a happy feeling and creates intimacy between couples and affects mental health, life satisfaction, and even income and academic success (8). Some studies refer to the relationship between sexual satisfaction and sexual variables (frequency of orgasm experience, frequency of sexual relationships per week, duration of sexual relationship each time), age interval of couples, length of the marriage, addiction, couples' marital commitment, education, and the quality of relationships such as supporting relationships, empathy and love, commitment and pregnancy, type of delivery, etc. (2, 6, 8).

Dissatisfaction with sexual function is closely related to social problems and divorce. Some studies report that between 40% and 82% of divorces and 40% of secret disloyalties by couples in Iran are due to sexual dissatisfaction (9-12). The results of some studies in Iran indicated that sexual satisfaction was high (8, 13-15), and others showed relative and average satisfaction of the participants (16).

Considering the importance of this issue, this study aimed to determine the sexual satisfaction and its related

factors among married women in Shahroud, northeast of Iran. According to the 2016 census, the population of Shahroud was 218628 (17).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design, setting, and sampling

This cross-sectional study was conducted in 2017 (from March to August) on 500 married women who referred to health care centers, and obstetrics and gynecology clinics in Shahroud, northeast of Iran. The proposal and methods of this study were reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University of Shahroud (Code No: Ir.lau.Shahrood.Rec1396.5). After a description of objectives of the study, oral informed consent was obtained from all participants. In the study, participation of all women was voluntary. The inclusion criteria of the study included individuals currently married and passing at least 1 year from a permanent marriage. If couples suffer from chronic medical conditions or psychological disease (based on self-report), they were not included in the study. To obtain the sample, researchers went to 11 health care centers and 4 obstetrics & gynecology clinics and the participants were selected through convenient sampling. For illiterate and low-literate individuals (9 and 50 persons respectively (11.8%)), the questionnaire was completed through interviews but literate participants completed the questionnaire themselves. Interviews were conducted by two senior well trained medical students.

Measurements

To measure sexual satisfaction, the Larsson Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire (LSSQ) (18) which contained 25 Likert items on a five-point scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often and always with a scoring range of 1 to 5) was used. Items 1-2-3-10-12-13-16-17-19-21-22-23 received score 1 for “never” scale and score 5 for “always” scale and items 4-5- 6-7-8-9-11- 14-15-18-20-24-25 are recoded and receive reverse scores. The psychometric properties of the Persian version of the LSSQ in Iranian infertile couples was assessed in 2013 (19). A score of 25 to 50 indicates sexual dissatisfaction; a score of 51 to 75 shows low sexual satisfaction; a score of 76 to 100 is an indication of average sexual satisfaction and a score of 101 to 125 is equivalent to high sexual satisfaction (19). Amiri and colleagues reported

the reliability of this questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha coefficients equal to 0.93 among fertile women and of 0.89 among infertile women (6). In our study, internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.84. To measure marital satisfaction, Enrich and Elson's marital satisfaction scale (20) was used. This questionnaire was translated into Persian and finally, the last Persian version of this questionnaire was approved by Elson (21).

Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted using the SPSS 15 through chi-square and one-way ANOVA. Multiple backward regression analyses were also performed to explore the relationship between sexual satisfaction as a continuous outcome variable and all other variables as predictors. The significance level in all tests was 0.05.

RESULTS

In this research, 500 married women in Shahroud city were studied using Larsson Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire. The results of the study showed that the mean age of the participants was 32.8 (SD= 8.66) years and the length of the marriage was 11.05 (SD= 9.1) years. Results of the Larson questionnaire showed that 4.4% (N=22) of the participants had low sexual satisfaction, 37.8% (N= 189) had moderate and 57.8% (N=289) had high sexual satisfaction. The mean score for sexual satisfaction was 101.61 (SD= 12.1).

The comparison of mean scores of some variables in terms of sexual satisfaction categories of women by one-way ANOVA showed that there was a significant difference between these categories in terms of age, spouse's age, length of the marriage and number of children, but no significant difference was observed with the first marriage age (Table I).

Chi-square tests for the relationship between sexual satisfaction and qualitative variables showed no significant relationships between sexual satisfaction categories with the job, husband's job, the place of residence, pregnancy history and delivery history. There was a significant relationship between sexual satisfaction levels and education (P<0.001) so that those with university education had higher sexual satisfaction. Also, there was a significant relationship between the level of

Table I: Comparison between the mean ± SD of some variables in terms of sexual satisfaction status

Variables	Sexual satisfaction:				F	P-value
	High (n=289)	Average (n=189)	Low (n=22)	Total		
Age (year)	35.91±9.82	34.95±9.57	31.16±7.52	32.80±8.66	13.03	<0.001
Spouse's age	41.95±9.07	39.41±10.69	35.66±8.38	37.35±9.55	11.99	<0.001
Length of marriage (year)	14.91±11.16	13.32±10.23	9.27±7.59	11.05±9.08	14.16	<0.001
First marriage age (year)	20.77±6.22	21.54±5.15	21.86±4.46	21.69±4.81	0.669	0.513
Number of children	1.55±1.10	1.63±1.19	1.22±0.99	1.39±1.09	8.34	<0.001

SD, Standard Deviation.

husband's education and sexual satisfaction ($P < 0.001$) so that those whose husbands had university education had higher sexual satisfaction. Chi-square test showed a significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and income ($P = 0.002$), so that those with higher income had higher mean sexual satisfaction (Table II).

Table II: The study of relationships between some variables with sexual satisfaction

Variables	Sexual satisfaction: Number (%)'			χ^2	P-value
	High (n=289)	Average (n=189)	Low (n=22)		
Education					
High school diploma and below	18(5.8)	139 (45)	152 (49.2)	25.15	0.001
Higher education	4(2.1)	50 (26.2)	137 (71.7)		
Spouse's education					
High school diploma and below	17(5.1)	146 (43.5)	173 (51.5)	16.73	0.001
Higher education	5(3)	43 (26.2)	116 (70.7)		
Income					
Less than 300 \$	18(5.9)	129 (42)	160 (52.1)	12.06	0.001
More than 300\$	4(2.1)	60 (31.1)	129 (66.8)		
Job					
Unemployed	19(4.7)	154 (37.9)	233 (57.4)	0.457	0.796
Employed	3(3.2)	35 (37.2)	56 (59.6)		
Spouse's Job					
Unemployed	1(5.3)	9 (47.4)	9 (47.4)	0.884	0.643
Employed	21(4.4)	180 (37.4)	280 (58.2)		
Place of residence					
City	17 (3.8)	170 (38.4)	256 (57.8)	3.13	0.209
Village	5 (8.8)	19 (33.3)	33 (57.9)		
Pregnancy experience					
Yes	19 (4.6)	161 (38.7)	236 (56.7)	1.18	0.554
No	3 (3.6)	28 (33.3)	53 (63.1)		
Delivery experience					
Yes	17 (4.5)	152 (40.2)	209 (55.3)	4.10	0.128
No	5 (4.1)	37 (30.3)	80 (65.6)		

* Data are shown with the percentage in parentheses

We performed a multiple backward regression model with sexual satisfaction as a continuous outcome variable and all other variables as predictors. In the final model, high-income level, length of marriage and higher education were had a significant association with an increase in sexual satisfaction score (Table III).

DISCUSSION

There was a significant difference in the mean age of women with different levels of sexual satisfaction so that

Table III: Multiple regression of predictors of sexual satisfaction of Iranian married women

variables	coefficient	SE	95% CI	Standardized beta	P-value
Education	3.18	1.16	(2.02 , 4.34)	0.13	0.006
Income	3.38	1.19	(1.05 , 5.71)	0.14	0.005
Length of marriage	-0.29	0.06	(-.41 , -.17)	-0.22	<0.001
constant	95.2	2.0	(91.2 , 99.12)	--	<0.001

SE, Standard Error
CI, confidence interval

those who were younger had higher sexual satisfaction. This finding is consistent with some studies in Iran and the world (16, 22), but is not in line with some others (8, 13-15, 23). This implies that the higher the age, the lower the number of sexual relationships, which could affect sexual satisfaction. There was a significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and husband's age, so that with the rise in the age of the husband, there was a decline in sexual satisfaction, which is consistent with the findings of some studies (13, 16, 24). Litzinger and colleagues reported no significant relationship between the age of the spouse and sexual satisfaction (25), which is not consistent with the recent study. It seems that age difference can be an important factor in understanding the different aspects of sexual relationships between couples. However, the age and age difference with the spouse are culture-bound issues; therefore, its effect on sexual satisfaction does not appear the same in different societies. In addition to age, women's sexual satisfaction depends on other factors including husband's sexual relationship. A study indicated that there is a strong correlation between male and female sexual function (26).

There was a significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and marriage length so that with the increase in the length of the marriage and the years of the couple's being together, there was a decrease in sexual satisfaction level, which is consistent with the findings of some studies (24) but not with the finding of another study (13). It seems that low sexual tendency in elderly women is strongly related to other sexual problems, such as the difficulty in reaching the stages of motivation and orgasm. Among these women, the factors associated with emotional feelings of relaxation and feeling of security with a sexual partner is more important (26). It may be concluded that with a longer marriage, the stability of family life increases in mental, psychological and emotional dimensions, and pay more attention to child-rearing topics keeps the spouses satisfied with their minimal sexual relations.

There was a meaningful relationship between sexual satisfaction and the number of children, which was consistent with the findings of Bahrami and colleagues (24) but not with the findings of another study (23). An increase in the number of children is usually accompanied by spending more energy and time by parents and, to

some extent, this reduces their opportunity to address sex-related issues and may over time create emotional distance or drifting between couples.

There was a significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and education, so that those with university education showed higher sexual satisfaction than other groups. This is in accord with the findings of some studies (16, 24, 27), but not with the findings of other studies (8, 13-15). Moreover, there was a significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and husband's education, but does not tally the findings of Darooneh and et al., and Golmakani and et al. (8, 13). In fact, high education enhances women's emotional, cognitive and rational skills in dealing with life problems. Acquiring knowledge improves marital communication by increasing intellectual growth and awareness of couples, and adds to marital skills.

There was a significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and household income, which was related to the findings of Bahrami and colleagues, Darooneh and colleagues, and Memarian and et al. (13, 16, 24), but did not match the findings of Masoumi and et al. (23). Improving the household's economic situation may increase sexual satisfaction, and couples who have a better economic situation may have more sexual satisfaction as a result of a decrease in their economic difficulties. Higher socioeconomic status is associated with better mental and physical health, which are correlated with higher sexual function, a variable closely related to sexual satisfaction (28).

There was no significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and the age of the first marriage, job, husband's job, place of residence, pregnancy history and delivery history, which is consistent with findings of some studies (14-16, 24) but not in line with some others (23, 29, 30). Among the participants in this study, 57.8% had high sexual satisfaction. Masoumi and colleagues reported a frequency of 12.5% for high satisfaction in their study. In other studies, the high satisfaction frequency percent were between 39.6%-69.5%. Some of these studies are consistent with the current study and some are not (6, 8, 13-16, 23, 24).

The limitation of this study includes the type of study (cross-sectional) and the use of a different method of data acquisition for illiterate and low-literate persons compared with the others which can lead response bias for sensitive questions regarding cross-cultural impacts.

CONCLUSION

Socio-economic variables such as education and income are among the main factors related to sexual satisfaction. Another main finding is the reverse relation of sexual satisfaction with the length of the marriage, which is due to the constitution of other psycho-social factors in their

cohabitations such as attention to children. However, counseling and counseling on couples' sexual issues after marriage can help improve their sexual satisfaction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the subjects who participated in the study.

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