
THE ROLE OF BEHAVIOURAL INTERVENTIONS IN ENHANCING MARITAL SATISFACTION AND ADJUSTMENT AMONG AGE HETERO-GAMY MARRIAGE COUPLES

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ABSTRACT:

The age difference is of perennial interest with regular comment, both academic and popular, on the frequency, social acceptability and sociobiological basis for various age gaps between partners. Generally, in societies, adult men generally prefer female partners who are somewhat younger than themselves, while adult women generally prefer male partners who are somewhat older than themselves. Thus, although there appears to be a general preference for small age gaps in marital relationships, they appear to remain open to somewhat larger age gaps and they do encounter many marital distresses. This study examines the effect of counselling in improving marital satisfaction and reducing marital distress among hetero-gamy couples of Wolaita Zone Sodo town women and children office married couples. The study adopted quasi-experimental study design and the data was collected from 15 married couples. The Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) and Marital adjustment scale (MAT) were administered to the participants included in the study. Later, five counselling session was given and again the data collection instruments were administered. The paired samples t-test was used to test the differences in marital satisfaction and marital distress among hetero-gamy couples. The results indicate that marital satisfaction improved and there was a reduction in marital distress among hetero-gamy couples after counselling. The results also revealed that there was a high negative correlation between marital distress and marital satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION:

Marriage is a form of legal commitment which holds significant implications for both the couples and for the whole family. It not only helps in placing the couple into a strong relationship but also establishes various levels of relationships within a family (Belot et. al., 2013). In general, it is seen that couples who are married are expected to assist each other in various spheres for instance dealing with economic responsibilities, engaging in sexual activities, bearing and raising children, etc. The bond a family shares as a unit depends a lot on the level of satisfaction and agreement a couple shares in a marriage. Hence, marital satisfaction is the variable of interest in the present study along with marital distress.

Marital satisfaction as far as is concerned, it is seen as the most significant feature in the success of the marriage. There is not one complete agreed upon definition of marital satisfaction. The most widely stated definitions of marital satisfaction are included here. Fine et al., (2013) quoted marital satisfaction to be the amount of serenity that a couple feels about their relationship whereas Parker & Commerford (2014) defined marital satisfaction as a subjective evaluation by an individual of the degree of happiness, pleasure, or fulfilment experienced within the marital relationship between the partner and self. Antfolk et al., (2015) stated it as the spouse's general perception of his or her marriage and spousal relationship. This can be a positive or a negative satisfaction towards the quality of marriage. It is generally thought that marriages in which there is inconsistency between the partners in mate value and the personality characteristics, results in both partners to be unfaithful, signalling marital dissatisfaction. On the other hand, marital dissatisfaction is also noticed to have a very reflective impact on the psychological wellbeing and mental soundness of the couples.

The occurrence of age-differentiated marriages (defined as 4 or more years' difference) is reportedly increasing (Amato, Johnson, Booth & Rogers, 2003). Using 2000 Census data, Fields and Casper (2001) found nearly one-quarter of all marriages were made up by couples with 6 or more years' difference in age between spouses. Studies on the areas of age-differentiated marriages have used numerous definitions of age difference between spouses. The current literature uses a range from one years' difference to as much as 25 years' difference (Barnes, 2005; Mansour et al., 2014). Such a wide range of definitions have resulted in inconsistent and indecisive findings when addressing how age differences are associated with marital outcomes. To remedy some of these inconsistent findings, many studies have examined variable, by which participants are divided into various groups, and then the groups are compared (Krippen, Chapman & Yu, 2010). However, such an approach makes it difficult to understand how age differences are incrementally associated with marital quality.

The increase in age-differentiated marriages has been ascribed to a lessening in social disapproval towards such marriages (Amato et al., 2003). However, age-differentiated marriages are just one form of heterogamous marriages that are becoming more acceptable in modern society. Heterogamy in marriage often includes age, race, religion, socioeconomic status, and sex. While such marriages are becoming more common and more acceptable, social disapprovals may still exist towards marriages wherein partners do not share harmonies such as with age. Stated differently, partners with similar backgrounds may be encouraged by family and friends to stay in or commit to homogamous relationships. If social disapproval does exist, it may create or worsen problems within the marital relationship. Alternatively, family and friends of couples with age differences may offer additional support to counterbalance any perceived negative influences.

Because of historical social disapproval towards a young person marrying a much older spouse, the purpose of this study is to examine how age differences currently relate to marital quality in couples in which one or both spouses are less than 35 years of age. Age differences will be measured as a continuous scale to identify nuances associated with age differences and marital quality. The purpose of this study is to explore how age differences affect couples on aspects of positive and negative marital quality, and how influential factors may moderate this association.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Although the focus of this study is on age-gap relationships, the general tendency for older men to pair with younger women is a worldwide phenomenon that has been documented in virtually all human societies, both past and presents (Ni Bhrolchain, 2006). There is some inconsistency, however, in terms of the size of the average marital age difference across cultures (United Nations, 2000). For illustration, in some African countries, the average age difference between married partners is three times the size of that in most western countries, approaching almost 10 years in some cases. This suggests that in non-western countries, partner age preferences might be massively different given variations in cultural norms.

Within western societies, though, both men and women appear willing to consider partners who fall outside of the desired with ± 3 -year window. Specifically, men's minimum acceptable age for a female partner is several years below their own age (5 to 15 years, with older men willing to consider relationships with larger age differences). In comparison, women's maximum acceptable age for a male partner is approximately 10 years above their own age, with this number remaining relatively constant as women age (Kenrick & Keefe, 2014). Thus, although there appears to be a general preference for small age gaps in westerners' relationships, they appear to remain open to somewhat larger age gaps in countries like Ethiopia.

Openness to larger age gaps is moderated by multiple factors, however, including one's sex, chronological age, as well as whether one is on their first or a later marriage (Iveniuket al., 2014). For instance, the older a man is at the time of marriage, the younger his female partner is likely to

be. In other words, as men get older, their tendency to partner with someone younger actually increases. The converse is true for women—the older a woman is at the time of marriage, the smaller the size of the relational age-gap (Iveniuket al., 2014). Studies also reflect that as age gap between partners increase, psychological problems between the partners also increase.

Taken together, the above findings indicate that at least some age difference is normative in heterosexual romantic involvements, but clearly the relative size of this difference varies depending upon numerous factors. This makes defining what constitutes a truly age-discrepant relationship. Age gap is one of the important factors that must be observed when selecting spouses. But the number of older men getting married to young women has increased significantly in recent years. Why the marriage of a young women to older men? Because unemployment and economic problems lead a number of younger women to marry older men adding that in a large number of such families' men are working outside home and providing financial support. Men who enter into such marriage usually have sexual motivation while women seek financial facilities. Men who have high social and economic status attract the attention of young women. The present study aims to find the martial distress and the marital satisfaction of the hetro-gamy aged couples and to examine the effects and need for counselling services on the issue, and the following objectives were framed.

1. To explore the marital adjustment among married age hetero-gamy couples
2. To reduce marital adjustment distress among age hetero-gamy marriage couples bycounselling.
3. To explore marital satisfaction among married age hetero-gamy couples
4. To increase marital satisfaction among age hetero-gamy marriage couples by counselling

The hypotheses framed for the present study are as follows.

Ho1. There will be no significant difference in marital adjustment among age hetero-gamy couple after counselling.

Ho2. There will be no significant difference in marital satisfaction among age hetero-gamy couple after counselling.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Relationship between marital satisfaction, age at marriage, and marital role performance was studied by Hayes (2007). "Role performance" was defined as the degree to which a person acts out what is perceived to be his or her role socioeconomically and interpersonally in marriage. Hayes used data from a non-random sample of 394 married couples, including spouses' evaluations of role performance in order to gain a more accurate response. Through the use of multivariate analysis, Hayes found a positive correlation between age at time of marriage and marital satisfaction after controlling the antecedent variables such as, length of marriage, education, socioeconomic background, and religious importance. This means that as the age at marriage increased, marital satisfaction increased as well.

Booth et al., (2001) extended on the research done by Bumpass and Sweet (1972) and Cowan (2014) and found that age at marriage was positively correlated with marital satisfaction due to inadequate preparation. They theorized that this situation likely stemmed from inadequate role models or from lack of exposure length to these role models because of early termination of their "marriage apprenticeship" as a result of early marriage. They argued that people who married at an early age were more likely to experience deficits in their marital role performance, which then led to marital dissatisfaction.

Mansour and McKinnish (2014) stated from his research results, that satisfied spouses are more likely to behave in ways that facilitate mutual understanding and less likely to disrespect or blame their partners. Other studies have supported that satisfied spouses express significantly lower levels

of anger and dislike as compared to their unsatisfied counterparts (Mansour and McKinnish (2014). Furthermore, social support networks and supportive behaviours between spouses have been related with improvements in marital quality (Banks&Arnold, 2015; Mansour and McKinnish (2014); Zak et al., 2016).

Vera, Berardo, and Berardo (1985) reported that age-differentiated marriages happened more frequently among the lower classes of people, exposing a belief at the time that such marriages were more common and acceptable among the upper classes. Whether this finding is valid or not, marriages within the upper classes, such as celebrity marriages, often produce more discussion and debate on the topic of age differences within marriage.

Researchers have tried to categorize age differences by placing participants into specific groups. Heaton (2002), for example, divided participants into one of four groups: (1) husbands older than 5 years, (2) husbands between 2-4 years older, (3) husbands between 0-2 years older, and (4) all wives older than their husbands. Using these categories, Heaton observed that marriages in which husbands were older than their wives were more stable, yet age differences themselves were not viewed as leading to more or less marital dissolution. Various researchers have also used similar categorization techniques (e.g., Chan&Halpin, 2003; Lehrer, 2008; Vera et al., 1985), which certainly have value in identifying differences between the varying groups, yet such techniques do not identify at what point, or even if, age differences become an important factor in marital quality and stability.

Positive marital quality is an important part of measuring the overall state of a marital relationship. While the use of marital happiness scales has its critics (Fowers, 2000), numerous studies have used this measurement to examine the overall marital state (Booth, Johnson, Amato, & Rogers, 2000; Glenn & Weaver, 1978). Studies have stated that couples within age-differentiated marriages did not experience the same level of marital happiness as did couples within age-similar marriages (Booth & Edwards, 1992; Heaton, 2002). However, Cowan (2014) and Groot and Van Den Brink (2002) found age-differentiated couples reporting happier with husband-older marriages than when the wife was older. Spousal communication also has been used to measure the level of positive marital quality, and has been associated with age differences in marriage. Proulx, Caron & Logue (2016), in their study of older women married to younger men, found that half of their couples known having different interests as being a problem. Having different interests may lead couples to drift apart, resulting in an increase in marital unsteadiness or divorce proneness. In support of this idea, Amato et al., (2003) found that couples in heterogamous relationships experienced less spousal communication than couples who were more homogenous. Thus, couples with age differences may be associated with lower positive marital interactions.

Age differences in marriage may be related to negative marital quality such as instability, problems, and disagreements. Though, Groot and Van Den Brink (2002) did not find an increase in marital instability due to age differences, Booth and Edwards (1992), Heaton (2002), and Krippen et al. (2010) all found age-differentiated couples displayed a greater tendency towards divorce proneness than did couples more similarly aged. Furthermore, Bumpass and Sweet (1972) reported higher than expected rates of divorce or separation in which age differences were large, particularly when wives were older than husbands. Bumpass and Sweet (1972) described age differences may promote more marital instability for three reasons: (1) value agreement may decrease as age differences increase, (2) age differences may cause a disparity in the power structure, particularly if the wife is older than the husband, and (3) broad age differences may be a result of personal characteristics that are not helpful to long-term marital stability.

Regarding marital problems, majority of authors have proposed that age differences are likely linked to greater marital problems due to social disapproval, as well as potential caregiving and financial issues (Hancock, Stuchbury, & Tomassini, 2003; Proulx et al., 2016). Few studies have

failed to find significant relations between age differences and negative outcomes (Barnes, 2005; Vera et al., 1985). However, those studies did not include older couples, and so further research is needed to study trends into later life.

While conflict in marriage is widely studied, little research has examined marital conflict as it relates to couples in age-differentiated marriages. One researcher has ventured that from theoretical grounds heterosexual relationships were more prone to marital conflict, particularly as a result of social disapproval (Udry, 2014). Proulx et al. (2016) observed that age differences were likely to affect differences in areas such as power struggles, interests, or fertility. Thus, like marital problems, disagreements may be related to age differences, yet research has not been able to categorically determine this association.

Older women are more independent, successful, and dominating than younger women (Bieber, 2012). At the same time, younger wives are less assertive towards their husbands (Presser, 2015), while younger husbands are viewed as being more inhibitive about working and more insecure in general. Marriages in which the power structures are more traditional (e.g., more husband dominance in decision making) have been shown to result in lower marital quality (Amato et al., 2003). As a result, some older wives may be more willing to share power with their younger husbands (McWherter, 2003) rather than to face marital uncertainty (Presser, 2015). Regarding the division of household labour, Blood and Wolfe (1960) suggested that older men may be less motivated to work together with their wives on routine household tasks, and more likely to assist with independent tasks. Rogler and Procidano (2016) found that younger spouses, who were similar in age, were more likely to share in household tasks

METHODOLOGY:

The main target of this study is to find whether counselling can improve marital satisfaction and adjustment among age hetero-gamy marriage couples who have marital distress at Wolita Soddo zone, Ethiopia. There are two governmental offices, among them one office, Wolita Zone Soddo town women and children office was selected randomly for the present study. The participants who involve in this study were married age hetero-gamy couples who have marital distress and approach the institution for help. There were 112 marriage couples in institutions with the problem of marital conflicts and from them 20 couples especially related with age hetero-gamy was selected by systematic sample method, but only 30 couples showed their willingness for the study. These 30 couples constituted the final study sample.

Quasi-experimental design was utilized by using pre and post-tests to measure the level of marital satisfaction and adjustment at the beginning of receiving personal counselling services and again after five sessions of counselling. Hence, the variables of interest include counselling services as the independent variable and marital satisfaction and marital adjustment as the dependent variable. This design allows comparison of pre and post test results. The design is therefore found appropriate for this particular study because it will enable the researcher to make comparisons between the pre and post results regarding the effectiveness of counselling services on reducing marital dissatisfaction and enhancing marital adjustment.

The demographic information included personal information such as sex, age, occupation, educational qualification, family income, and number of siblings, friends, place of residence and other personal information. The purpose of these demographic details is to identify the possibilities of demographic factors that influence marital satisfaction and improve marital adjustment. Marital satisfaction questionnaire (MSQ) designed by Haynes and Floyd, (1992), a standardized instrument which measure the factors leading marital dissatisfaction was used. MSQ consists of 24 items which address specific areas of marital distress, and when summed, generate a Marital Satisfaction Scale score. A notable characteristic of the MSQ is its efficiency. It can usually be completed in 6—8 min. The authors report of high reliability (0.92) and validity.

Marital Adjustment Scale was used to measure marital adjustment. Although developed in 1959, it remains a widely used tool for evaluating marital relationships. The questionnaire was developed by Corcoran Fischer (1987). The scale consists of 15 items, each defined by marital happiness and marital satisfaction. Each item is scored according to the statement by marking a tick mark against the statement. The author quoted high reliability and validity on his instrument. Internal construct was estimated using the Spearman-Brown formula and was very good with a correlation of .90. The instrument is internally consistent and discriminates reliably between distressed and non-distressed couples. The author states that the administration time for the scale is 10 minutes.

COUNSELLING PROGRAM:

The individual counselling was given to all couples included in the study. The counselling sessions began with an introduction to the couples by the investigator and explaining about the counselling and the subsequent sessions. The researcher at the beginning of counselling started with an informal talk and made the couples to talk freely about the unpleasant feeling between them. The researcher applied the happening--thought--feeling--reaction diagram (Bernard & Joyce, 1984) in analysing couples' feelings in certain situations and in helping to analyse the feelings. The researcher used eclectic approach while giving counselling. Eclectic therapy is a therapeutic approach that incorporates a variety of therapeutic principles and philosophies in order to create the ideal treatment program to meet the specific needs of the couples. Instead of insisting upon strict adherence to one particular approach or school of thought, eclectic therapists employ elements from a range of therapeutic techniques, with the goal of establishing a course that is personally tailored to the client.

To conduct and accomplished the research, the questionnaire administering process started after getting permission from Wolita Zone Soddo town women and children office. After getting permission, the investigator personally contacted the respondents in their respective places and administered the questionnaires. Any doubts raised by the respondents were cleared and were requested to fill the questionnaire honestly. The respondents were assured that the responses what they give will be kept confidential.

The data collected from the respondents were first edited and coded. The statistical analysis of data was done through computer applications using SPSS version 20. The main thrust of the data analysis was to test the hypotheses. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was computed

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

The following describes the background information of respondents and later the test results.

Distributions of respondents Gender

| S.No | Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|------|--------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Male | 15 | 50 |
| 2 | Female | 15 | 50 |
| | Total | 30 | 100 |

As shown in the in the above table, 50% of the respondents were male and 50% of the respondents are also females.

Distributions of respondents Age

| S.No | Age group | Frequency | Percentage |
|------|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Less than 30years | 12 | 40.0 |
| 2 | 30–40years | 4 | 13.3 |
| 3 | 40–50years | 13 | 43.3 |
| 4 | Above50years | 1 | 3.3 |
| | Total | 30 | 100.0 |

The above shows the agegroup of respondents. 43.3% respondents were in the age group of 40-50years, 40.0% of respondents were in the ages of less than 30 years, 13.3 % of respondents were between 30-40years and 3.3% of respondents were above 50 years of age.

Occupation background of the respondents

| S.No | Occupation of the Respondents | Frequency | Percent |
|------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| 1 | Government | 10 | 33.3 |
| 2 | Nongovernment | 11 | 36.7 |
| 3 | Un employed | 9 | 30 |
| | Total | 30 | 100.0 |

Above table indicate the occupation level of the respondents.36.7%of respondents work in non-governmental organization; 33.3% of the respondents work at governmental organization and 30.0% of respondents remain unemployed.

Mean difference in age amongHetro-gamy couple

| S.No | Groups | Mean | N | Std. Dev. | T value | Sig. |
|------|--------|-------|----|-----------|---------|-------|
| 1 | Male | 45.13 | 15 | 7.18 | 10.33 | 0.001 |
| 2 | Female | 24.33 | 15 | 3.01 | | |

In the above table, the value 10.33 for the mean difference in the ages between male and female partners were statistically significant ($P < 0.001$). The mean ages of the males and females were 45.133 and 24.333 respectively. It reveals that the male partners ages were significantly higher that the female partners. Thus, the couples selected for the research were of age hetro-gamy.

Means difference in the Marital Adjustment scores of the respondents Before and After Counselling

| S.No | Groups | Mean | N | Std. Dev. | T value | Sig. |
|------|---------------------------|------|----|-----------|---------|-------|
| 1 | Marital Adjustment (pre) | 2.34 | 30 | 68.78 | 9.494 | 0.001 |
| 2 | Marital Adjustment (post) | 3.35 | 30 | 46.18 | | |

In the above table, the t-value 9.494indicate that there is a statistically mean difference between the two mean scores of marital adjustments among respondents observed before and after receiving treatment ($P < 0.001$).The mean marital adjustment (Pre) and marital adjustment (Post)

scores were 2.34 and 3.35 respectively. The mean difference in marital adjustment (Pre) and marital adjustment (Post) scores were statistically significant and it is believed by the researcher that it has been effective due to the treatment effect.

**Means difference in the Marital Satisfaction scores of the respondents
Before and After Counselling**

| S.No | Groups | Mean | N | Std. Dev | T value | Sig |
|------|-----------------------------|------|----|----------|---------|-------|
| 1 | Marital Satisfaction (Pre) | 1.89 | 30 | 0.61 | 10.45 | 0.001 |
| 2 | Marital Satisfaction (Post) | 4.11 | 30 | 1.07 | | |

In the above table, the t-value 10.45 indicate that there is a statistically mean difference between the two mean scores of marital satisfaction among respondents observed before and after receiving counselling ($P < 0.001$). The mean marital satisfaction (Pre) and marital satisfaction (Post) score were 1.89 and 4.11 respectively. The mean difference in mean marital satisfaction (Pre) and marital satisfaction (Post) score was statistically significant and it is believed by the researcher that it has been effective due to the counselling programme.

Correlation between Marital Distress and Marital Satisfaction

| | | Marital Adjustment) | Marital Satisfaction |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Marital Adjustment | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .763** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 30 | 30 |
| Marital Satisfaction | Pearson Correlation | .763** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 30 | 30 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above table reveals the correlation between marital status and marital satisfaction of the hetero-gamy couples. The correlation value 0.763 reveals that there is a high positive correlation between marital adjustment and marital satisfaction ($P < 0.001$). It means that the hetero-gamy couples who have high marital satisfaction have high marital adjustment in their married life.

DISCUSSIONS:

In the present study the major concern was to examine the effectiveness of counselling in reducing marital distress and increasing marital satisfaction among age hetero-gamy couples. In the present study the mean age differences among the couples (Male 45 years and Female 24 years) was considerably higher than the studies conducted at western society. For example, in Western societies, adult men generally prefer female partners who are somewhat younger than themselves, while adult women generally prefer male partners who are somewhat older than themselves (Buss, 2016; Kenrick, Gabrielidis, Keefe, & Cornelius, 2016; Kenrick & Keefe, 2014). Such findings have been noted across numerous studies using a variety of methods (asking participants how likely they would be to date targets of various ages, analyzing the content of personal advertisements placed in newspapers). On average, men prefer partners approximately three years younger, in contrast with women, who prefer partners approximately three years older (Buss, 2016). The huge difference in age between the partners in the present study may of several factors, especially economic.

The results also revealed that marital distress and marital satisfaction was significantly related to age heterogamy among couples. This finding was also supported by other researchers; as they notified that age gap between couples have considerable impact on marital satisfaction (Rahmani et al. 2011; Halford et.al, 2013). A few research findings show a significant reverse association was observed between narrow or no age difference and marital distress and marital satisfaction. Finding of some studies support this finding that the lower the age gap, less the marital distress and high marital satisfaction (Rahmani et al. 2011; Halford et.al, 2013).

Finally, after receiving counselling by age heterogamy couples, perceived marital distress reduced significantly and marital satisfaction improved. The couples were found to have improved communication and like to have a good and happy life. Participation in the pre-marriage training on communication skills had a positive effect on the couples' marital satisfaction after the marriage. Studies also have shown that teaching problem solving skills, conflict resolution and understanding the differences between men and women is a key component of effective communication (Carroll and Doherty, 2013) and stability of life (Behboodi-Moghadam et.al., 2015).

Research studies in Iran have shown the effect of counseling on marital satisfaction (Farnam et al., 2016), conducted on 64 couples. In their study, the samples in the intervention group participated in 4 counseling sessions including family planning, personal hygiene, communication skills, marital distress, marital satisfaction and problem-solving skill and the results showed that the classes had a positive effect on marital satisfaction (Farnam et al., 2016). In the present study, 5 counseling sessions were conducted, which focused on all aspects of marital distress. The results showed that the marital satisfaction increased significantly after the session. Supporting the present study, a study by Farnam, et al., (2016) showed that the level of marital satisfaction was measured 4 months after the intervention, which showed that marital satisfaction was higher compared to pre-intervention.

Based on the research findings, the researcher firmly believed that all age gap marriage couple should take counselling services in order to deal with their psychological problems and to assist them change their attitudes, behaviour and sense of accomplishment in their marriage life. Marital issues are universal issues that give significant affect to many others field of studies of life. Therefore, it is important to improve the issues continuously in order to make better development to the couple of marriage which is also give better affect to their life and environment.

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