

Original Article

Comparison of Sexual Self-Efficacy, Self-Differentiation and Communication Patterns in Iranian Women with Early and Typical Marriage

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Marriage is one of important social phenomena that has a very sensitive role on all aspects of human life and having physical, psychological and social preparation is necessary for it. The age which individual gets married is one of the important factors that can affect the quality of marriage and its psychological function. This study aimed to compare sexual self-efficacy, self-differentiation and communication patterns in early marriage and normal marriage.

Materials and Methods: The method of the present study was causal-comparative. The statistical population included all women referred to Ardabil Health Center who were married under the age of 18 and over the age of 18 or older and both groups of women lived in Ardabil in 2019. The sample of the present study consisted of 40 individuals who were selected by convenience sampling method. Also, 40 women with normal marriage conditions who were matched with their spouse's child group in terms of age, level of education were selected by available means. Couples Communication Patterns Questionnaire, Self-Differentiation Questionnaire and completed Sexual Self-Efficacy. Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance.

Results: The results showed that sexual self-efficacy, self-differentiation, constructive communication pattern and avoidance-reciprocal communication pattern were significantly different between the two groups ($p < 0.05$) and observed a difference in the expectation/withdrawal communication subscale. No difference was observed.

Conclusion: In explaining communication problems and use of incompatible communication methods in early marriage, it can be said that EM, increases likely hood of communication violence. Another explanation observed in early marriage is the lack of right to choose the right one to marry and preparation for having sex which reduces couple's marital intimacy, intensifies marital conflicts, and increases the possibility of violence in couples' relationships and ineffective communication patterns. Another finding in this survey indicated that self-differentiation in EM is less than later marriage women. In explaining this finding, it can be said that child marriage often happens during adolescence. It is the stage of transition to adulthood, gaining new experiences and facing new challenges.

Keywords: Early marriage, Sexual self-efficacy, Self-differentiation, Communication, Women

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Introduction

Menopause Marriage has been describe as most important and fundamental relationship of the humanity (1). Early marriage (EM) occurs in some regions of the world (2). Early marriage, which refers to marriage under the age of 18, and it can have devastating consequences for both genders (3). Given that early marriage can have many negative consequences for girls by affecting their physical, mental, and social health worldwide, an estimated 650 million girls and women alive today married before their 18th birthdays (2). One in three girls in developing countries is married before age 18, while one in five girls is married before age 15 (4, 5) According to research 2022 of the Civil Law of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the legal ages of marriage are 13 and 15 years for girls and boys, respectively. Although child marriage is not common in Iran, it exists in less developed places and among specific cultures and ethnicities, where it is an accepted social and cultural norm (6). Contrary to the general belief that early marriages are prevalent in rural and tribal areas, early marriage takes place at a higher rate in some urban areas, especially those that have remained more conservative and traditional or have retained a strong sense of ethnic identity (7). Many females around the globe are subjected to early marriage with immature minds and bodies, and they are forced to shoulder heavy duties, early pregnancies, harsh family behaviors, family disputes, behavioral problems and understanding problems. One of associated issues need to be discussed about marriage is, time (5), which has legal, psychological, moral, social, and educational dimensions. The age of marriage is defined according to cultural, social, religious, and ethnic specifications of each society (8-10). The age of marriage, both legally and culturally, varies from country to country, and there are many debates supporting marriage at an older age or a younger age. On the definition for child marriage, often synonymously referred to as early

marriage (EM), which is defined by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as the union of an individual before age 18. Such terms have become normative, used today among governments, non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups, popular media, researchers, and members of affected communities alike. Indeed, references to child marriage appear more frequently than a decade ago, for this reason, a worldwide minimum age is considered in most countries legal law (11). Although EM has generally decreased over the past 30 years, but in South Asian region trend of marrying females at very early age is high, which is one of the major causes of domestic violence, physical burdens and health consequences and it is still common even among young generations and low-income rural areas. EM requires special concerns due to destructive psychological, social and economic consequences it has for child brides and their families (12). In addition, girls who marry early, are not ready to be aware of adult world responsibilities (13). The practice is increasingly recognized as a key roadblock to global health, violation of human rights that harms children, especially girls. Worldwide, an estimated 14.2 million girls married before their 18th birthdays since 2011 to 2020, and this number would be 15.1 million from 2021 to 2030 (15000 cases per day) (14). According to the latest statistics released by the UNICEF, the prevalence of child marriage for children under the age of 15 is 5% worldwide and 3% in Iran. In 2020, a fifth (20%) of the children worldwide and 17% in Iran were married under 18 years of age (15). According to recent statistics and based on the age distribution diagram Civil Registry Organization in 2017, an estimation of 133086 EM 14-18 years old ages, registered which in total, more than 146000 marriages took place at under 18 years' age. On the other hand, divorce ratio increasingly documented at 10-18 years' ages. according to the latest demographic data in 2018, 11535 divorces (14-18 ages) have been recorded, which is more than 11000, under the age of 18. Studies of Bailey assessed that EM in adolescent leads to divorce (9). In Ardabil Province the divorce rate in

EM women under age of 20 were documented 30 % which it is more than late marriages (16). According to the statistics of Ardabil Welfare Organization in 2019, increasing women who filed for a divorce, with early marriages has been reported (17). On the other hand, some researchers believe that marriage is like human development, if it is delayed, it will bring weaknesses for marital relationship in elderly time (18). EM before emotional and physical maturity brings girls into the adulthood, which has harmful consequences on girls' physical, educational, economic and social health status (19), lack of emotional, psychological and social skills make people vulnerable to problems (20). In fact, those who marry early may be prone to domestic violence, abuse, poverty, depression, suicide, high-risk abortion, maternal mortality, and low birth weight (21). Several studies have explored that women with EM experience more sexual problems due to not expressing sexual functioning problems and being ashamed of sex. In general, decisions about sexual matters in marital relations are made by their husbands, so they are not able to make decisions about their sexual functions and health problems (22). Also, experts excluded those women who marry early are at high risk of sexual and physical violence during marriage Sexual self-efficacy is essential for appropriate and desirable sexual function and sexual quality of life. It refers to one's self-confidence for managing sexual relationships and properly adapting to the sex partner (23), sexual satisfaction is a key factor in human life and associated with relationship quality (24). EM lacks the sexual preparations and have sexual dissatisfactions (13). One of main factors which affects sexual self-efficacy is aging. In other words, by getting older, sexual self-efficacy improves which it is low in early adolescents (25). By aging, gender identity formation and improvement in sexual self-efficacy (26), sexual problems decrease and it leads to promote sexual quality of life in young women (27). In fact, sexual self-efficacy is essential for having appropriate and desirable sexual function (28).

Self-differentiation includes both personal and interpersonal functioning and refers to the individual's ability to differentiate between

intellectual and emotional functioning, both within the individual and between the individual and others (29); on interpersonal level, it is the ability to create intimate, emotional ties with others while remaining on some level independent from them, experiencing both intimacy and autonomy (30). In fact, self-differentiation is formed in the shadow of psychological independencies, emotional maturity and is a permanent and dynamic factor. Differentiated-self people have more emotional stability and can better manage their emotions. They are able to deal with stressful situations logically and rationally (31). These couples better adapt facing conflictions and display less emotional instability. Thus, more marital satisfaction, stable interpersonal relationships they experience and they commit better interactions with their children (32). Studies revealed that, in response to marriages at early ages, females still do not achieve emotional and psychological maturity. So, the less self-differentiation they set, the more anxiety they experience (33). Augmenting evidence, several studies have explored that child brides have less autonomy interacting their spouses (34) and can act as a barrier to women's use of family planning (35). Autonomy is her ability to control her husband's economic and social resources; in some cultures, including Iran, the more marriage age increase, the more power and respect they gain, and because of the fact that in child marriage, husband often is older than his wife, her autonomy became restricted. Also, in some cultures, women are expected to be submissive to their husbands and not to under question their authority. Thus, the young age, make gap between couples and cultural expectations drive EM females to less self-differentiation (36).

One of the factors may seems to be related to marriage is the quality of communication between couples. Couples communication pattern, that is, communication channels through which spouses interact with each other verbally and non-verbally (37). Christensen & Sullaway, 1991 classified and evaluated couple's behavior during three stages of marital conflict as They are: When a problem arises in the couple's relationship, during the discussion about the communication problem and after discussion about the communication problem. These behaviors are categorized into three scales of mutual organization

communication, mutual avoidance communication scale and expectation/withdrawal. here are nine distinct forms of violence and abuse: physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, spiritual, cultural violence, verbal abuse, financial abuse, and neglect. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is abuse or aggression that occurs in a close relationship. Intimate partner refers to both current and former spouses and dating partners (38). Approximately 27% of all ever-partnered women have experienced physical or sexual abuse from their intimate partner (39). Studies indicate that, communication violence in EM is likely to be more than later marriages (40). Gender inequality in early marriages is one of the reasons for this, which occurs more than later. Women with normal marriages show behaviors that reinforce gender inequality in their husbands (physically). For example, women in early marriage justify being beaten by their spouse and dominance (40) Justification increases husbands physical and emotional violence towards his wife.

Methods

This study was causal-comparison study. The statistical population consisted of all the women who referred to Health Centers in Ardabil city. According to the National Census of 2016, the population of Ardabil province had risen to 1,270,420 inhabitants in 377,423 households. This trial was conducted by the researchers, giving questionnaires in health centers (41). The first group included women who had been married over their 18th age for at least one or two years long. The second group, who were married at the age of under 18, with marriage duration as first group. Forty of these women were selected by convenience sampling from each group. The two studied groups were matched in terms of demographic characteristics such as the level of education and marital duration. The procedure of this study was reviewed and approved by the Deputy of Health Centers in Ardabil province.

Materials

Differentiation of Self Inventory Revised (DSI-R)

The Differentiation of Self Inventory Revised (DSI-

R) was developed by Skowron and Friedlander (42). This questionnaire is a 46-item self-report, which measures intra-psychic and interpersonal aspects of differentiation of self on four subscales: (1) Emotional Reactivity (ER—11 items); (2) I-Position (IP – 11 items); (3) Emotional Cut of (EC – 12 items); and (4) Fusion with Others (FO—12 items). The questionnaire was completed by expressing agreement according to a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“Totally disagree”) to 6 (“Totally agree”). Higher scores on the four dimensions indicate greater differentiation of self. In Iranian version, Askian(43) using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, reported the reliability of the questionnaire as 0.81. Also, the alpha coefficient reported by Plege – Popko(44) is 0.86. The validity of this questionnaire was confirmed by experts.

Christensen and Sullaway CPQ Communication Pattern Questionnaire This questionnaire determines the behavior of couples designed to estimate marital relationship. The CPQ is a 35-item self-report measurement which addresses spouses' behavior during three stages of conflict: (a) when some problem in the relationship arises, (b) during a discussion of a relationship problem, and (c) after a discussion of a relationship problem. Christensen (45) presented data concerning the reliability and validity of three subscales of the CPQ: demand/withdraw communication, mutual avoidance, and mutual constructive communication. He demonstrated that there was relatively high agreement between partners' independent reports for these three subscales. In Iran, Ebadatpour standardized the above questionnaire and calculated the correlation between the scales of this questionnaire. He also found that the mutual constructive communication and demand/withdraw communication subscales were significantly related to marital adjustment in the expected direction (46).

Sexual Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (SSQ) This questionnaire was standardized by Vaziri and Lotfi Kashani (47) based on Schwarzer's General Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (48). It has 10 questions that are scored from 0 to 3. The internal consistency of this questionnaire using Cronbach's Alpha measurement method, split-half method of Spearman Brown and Guttman scaling was reported as 0.86, 0.81 and 0.81 respectively. The questionnaire measures items about one's self confidence in doing sexual activities, sexual

competence, and sexual pleasure. The reliability of this questionnaire in Iran has been confirmed using the content-dependent validity method (47).

Results

The current study examined the sexual self-efficacy, self-differentiation and communication patterns in Iranian women with early marriage (N=40, M and SD age=16.05±1) and normal marriage (N=40, M and SD age=23.90 ± 2). Table 1 shows the descriptive indices related to the variables in two studied groups.

Multivariate analysis of Variance (MANOVA), was used to compare sexual self-efficacy, self-differentiation, constructive communication patterns, expectant/avoidant communication patterns, and mutual

avoidance relational patterns in both groups. Before using MANOVA, the assumptions of this test must be met. Therefore, Box's M tests were used to check the similarity matrix of variance-covariance of dependent variables between groups. The results showed that this condition was met ($F = 1.368$, $M_{Box} = 5.34$, $p > 0.05$). Leven's Test also used to measure the equality of error variance of variables between groups (Sexual self-efficacy, $F=0.153$; Self-differentiation, $F=1.041$; intercommunication pattern, $F=2.260$; Demand/withdrawal communication pattern, $F=1.947$; mutual avoidance pattern, $F=2.816$), the results showed none of these tests were significant ($p > 0.05$); Therefore, MANOVA is prohibited. The results of the MANOVA showed in Tables 2 and 3. The Wilks' Lambda in Table 2 showed a significant difference between the groups in the linear combination of all variables (Wilks, Lambda= 0.553, $p > 0.0001$). As it can be seen in table 2, the significance levels of all tests allow use of MANOVA. This indicates that there is a significant difference between women with early marriage and normal marriage in terms of one of the dependent variables.

The results of the multivariate analysis of variance presented in Table 3 indicates sexual self-efficacy, self-differentiation, mutual constructive communication pattern and avoidant- communication pattern have significant differences in two studied groups. Compliance with ethical standards women married after 18 years of age have more self-differentiation and sexual self-efficacy compared to child brides. This group of women use more constructive communication patterns in their relationships and use avoidance-reciprocal communication pattern less. The two studied groups did not have a significant difference in the expectant/avoidant communication pattern sub scales.

Table 1. Descriptive variables.

Groups	Variables	Mean± SD
Early Marriage	Sexual self-efficacy	18.68±4.46
	Self-differentiation	165.08±27.55
	Ego reactivity	45.98±6.04
	Ego position	48.04±5.87
	Other fusion	38/09±6.98
	Emotional escape	32.97±6.43
	Constructive Communication patterns	7.24±4.04
	Expectant/avoidant communication patterns	12.36±3.52
	Mutual avoidance relational patterns	25.68±6.18
Normal Marriage	Sexual self-efficacy	20.80± 4.03
	Self-differentiation	182.40±22.79
	Ego reactivity	50.98±5.04
	Ego position	51.04±6.87
	Ego position	41.04±5.87
	Other fusion	39/09±4.98
	Constructive communication patterns	9.80±3.90
	Expectant/avoidant communication patterns	22.96±7.68
	Mutual avoidance relational patterns	16.68±4.76

Table 2. Results of Multivariate Variance Analysis on the Scores of Variables in Both Groups.

Test Statistic	Wilks Lambda
Value	0.447
F	7.115
Df	1
Df error	37
P	0.0001

Discussion

Marriage brings unique changes in people's lives. According to the definition of UNICEF (9) marriage that takes place before the age of 18 is called child marriage or early marriage, and approximately 40% of girls get married before reaching this age. The present study aims at comparing self-differentiation, sexual

self-efficacy and communication patterns between girls with early marriage and normal marriage. Multivariate analysis of variance was used to analyze the data. Findings of the present study are in line with Neeto and his colleague's surveys, indicated that girls with EM have less self-differentiation and sexual self-efficacy compared to women with later marriage ($p < 0.05$).

This situation along with young age can explain low self-differentiation in women with early marriage. In explaining communication problems and use of incompatible communication methods in early marriage, it can be said that in this type of marriage, the probability of communication violence is higher (49) and violent interactions, reduce intimate communication patterns, rational and wise decisions between couples (50). Another explanation that can be given for the communication problems observed in early marriage is the lack of right to choose when and with whom a person would marry, as well as the lack of preparation for having sex in the first years of marriage. It reduces couple's marital intimacy, intensifies marital conflicts, and increases the possibility of violence in couples' relationships and ineffective communication patterns. Another finding in this survey indicated that self-differentiation in EM is less than later marriage women. In explaining these findings, it can be said that child marriage often happens during adolescence. It is the stage of transition to adulthood, gaining new experiences and facing new challenges. The identity formation and intimate relationships growth is the most important developmental transition to adulthood, during this period person accepts responsibility for his/her emotions, financial decisions and intimate relationships with his peers more than parents. Thus, girls who marry early enter adults' world, are not ready to accept the responsibilities (25) and have not acquired the developmental transition to adulthood. They have not

achieved self-differentiation, which is one of developmental transitions (51). Another explanation would given for these findings is that child marriage takes place by bride's family decision, bride does not have much role in choosing her husband, and these girls as compared to late marriages, have age gap with their husbands (52). This situation aggravates the imbalance of power in couples' relationships and limits the decision-making ability and girl's autonomy as well (13). It can lead to low self-differentiation in girls with EM. In this regard, considering health status and demographic characteristics of girls in 34 countries at age ranges (20-24 years) who were married before the age of 18, assessed that, these girls were more likely to experience physical and sexual violence in comparison with marriage in adult age (45). Various studies have shown that people with a high level of education, have higher self-efficacy. Increasing social support, family communication and negotiation skills predict higher sexual self-efficacy, especially in young women (25). Related to this issue, some researchers showed that women who experienced early sexual compulsions had lower sexual self-efficacy (23).

Conclusion

According to findings of study, it can be concluded that women with early marriage have less self-differentiation and sexual self-efficacy compared to normal marriage. This group of women use avoidant-reciprocal communication patterns more in their relationships and use constructive communication patterns less. Compliance with ethical standards married after 18 years of age have more self-differentiation and sexual self-efficacy compared to child brides. This group of women use more constructive communication patterns in their relationships and use avoidance-reciprocal

Table 3.Results of One-variable Analysis in the text of MANOVA on the Scores of Variables in Two Groups.

Dependent Variable	SS	Df	MS	F	P-value
Sexual self-efficacy	56.180	1	56.180	3.109	0.04
Self-differentiation	3749.780	1	3749.780	5.863	0.019
CP Mutual builder	81.920	1	81.920	5.184	0.027
CP Expectant/avoidant	92.480	1	92.480	1.902	0.174
CP Mutual avoidance	233.280	1	233.280	13.280	0.001

communication pattern less. Also, considering the negative consequences of early marriage, it is suggested to increase legal age for this type of marriage. Provide preventive education through schools, cultural centers and non-governmental organizations to parents and teenage girls, such as training parents about the appropriate age of marriage and conditions of teenage girl's support and companionship for a suitable marriage. Increasing girl's self-confidence and necessary ability versus adults, even parents who want to force them to marry before they reach the age of puberty. It is also suggested to carry out extensive research to investigate, the nature, sexual violence and issues related to early formal and informal marriages as more accurately as possible.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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