

The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence, Marital and Relationship Satisfaction among Married Couples in Johor Bahru

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This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital and relationship satisfaction among married couples in Johor Bahru. A total of 142 married individuals participated in this survey by answering the online questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of emotional intelligence (33-items), relationship satisfaction (6-items), and marital satisfaction (15-items). Overall, the results showed that married couples in Johor Bahru experience a high level of emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction and a moderate level of marital satisfaction. The correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and marital and relationship satisfaction. The study's findings are consistent with the previous literature that supported the notion that emotional intelligence helps married couples gain greater satisfaction through successful communication and resolution of conflict within their marital institution.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, marital satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, marriage

In the current global scenario, the number of divorce cases has risen daily, which portrayed the instability of marital institutions among married couples nowadays. According to Kaytez (2020), divorce cases have steadily increased globally, while marriages have decreased. Similarly, the number of divorce cases in Malaysia increased by 0.1 per cent, from 203,741 in 2017 to 206,253 in 2018 (Dato' Sri Dr Mohd Uzir, 2019). Many factors contribute to marriage well-being and divorce: education, gender, socioeconomic class, commitment, marital communication, conflict, the presence of children and sexual interactions. Also, emotional intelligence is one of the crucial aspects that can affect marriage and is worth investigating further.

Each married couple should recognize the importance of having good emotional intelligence in their marital life. According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is not determined by how much we have

learned; instead, it describes our ability to learn and our skill in managing and understanding our emotions. By thinking about their own and others' emotions, people can share, understand, and manage emotional information (Agha & Mokhtaree, 2012). When both couples understand each other's feelings, the rate of marital and relationship satisfaction may be increased.

Brackett, Warner, and Bosco (2005) stated that emotional intelligence comprises of four abilities: emotional perception, facilitation of thoughts, emotional understanding, and emotional management in both self and others. All elements represent an individual's capacity to reason with and about emotion to improve cognitive processes and social functioning (Brackett et al., 2005). According to the ability theory, emotional intelligence is a set of cognitive skills that primarily function to notice, use, interpret, and manage emotion, allowing individuals to

adapt to a particular environment (Antoñanzas, 2017). It consists of four fundamental abilities: perceiving and expressing emotions, emotional facilitation of thinking, emotional understanding, and emotional management (Antoñanzas, 2017).

Hence, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence can significantly influence marriage and is associated with a couple's marital and relationship satisfaction (Abbasi, Tabatabaei, & Sharbaf, 2016; Eslami, Hasanzadeh, & Farid, 2014; Schroder-Abe & Schutz, 2011; Brackett et al., 2005). Brackett et al. (2005) stated that couples with low emotional intelligence in both partners would have the lowest depth, support, positive relationship quality scores and the highest conflict and negative relationship quality scores. Married couples should have an awareness of how to regulate their emotion to channel into adaptive actions. Thus, both partners are responsible for improving their emotional intelligence to achieve a quality of life after marriage.

Much research has confirmed a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction among married couples (Abbasi et al., 2016; Eslami et al., 2014; Mary & Andhikari, 2012; Anghel, 2016; Yediri & Hamart, 2015). A study conducted by Abbasi et al. (2016) showed that emotional intelligence has a significant positive relationship with marital satisfaction, and it is the crucial factor in achieving marital satisfaction. Another research conducted by Eslami et al. (2014) revealed a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction among 226 married individuals in Iran. In the study, people with a high degree of emotional intelligence had coordination in social situations, higher self-control, higher social skills, more cooperative responses, closer relation, and eventually more marital satisfaction.

In addition, two studies conducted among married couples in India reported a positive

correlation between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction among married couples (Lavalekar, Kulkarni, & Jagtap, 2010; Mary & Andhikari, 2012). Lavalekar et al. (2010) found that controlling emotions, comprehending and respecting the feelings of family members are all crucial components in a marriage. Meanwhile, the husband's emotional intelligence was positively associated with his wife's marital quality and vice versa (Mary & Andhikari, 2012). Moreover, Anghel (2016) and Yedirir and Hamarta (2015) found a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction among married couples in the European region conducted in Romania and Turkey. It is worth noting that women and men in stable relationships have significant differences in the personal balancing of emotions (Anghels, 2016). The gender impact does have a part in the regulation and balancing of emotions among individuals.

Similarly, many studies reported a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction among married couples (Schroder-Abe & Schutz, 2011; Egeci & Gencoz, 2011; Koohsar & Bonab, 2011; Madahi, Samadzadeh, & Javidi, 2013). A study conducted by Koohsar and Bonab (2011) found that individuals who have closed attachments have the highest emotional intelligence. This study shows that when a person has a high level of attachment in their marriage, which is derived from the understanding of each other, relationship satisfaction will be increased. Furthermore, Schroder-Abe and Schutz (2011) showed a relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction and shed light on the processes through which emotional intelligence affects the quality of a romantic relationship.

Another study by Smith, Heaven and Ciarrochi (2008) and Madahi et al. (2013) highlighted emotional intelligence and effective communication patterns on

relationship satisfaction. The study's outcome showed that the most satisfied couples did not avoid discussing relationship issues and assessed their partners' emotional intelligence as high (Smith et al., 2008). Meanwhile, Madahi et al. (2013) stated that demanded-withdraw communication would lead to dissatisfaction within the relationship. Spouses who constantly communicate with each other will have more understanding of emotion and helps to increase their relationship satisfaction.

Recent studies conducted between emotional intelligence and marital and relationship satisfaction were conducted in countries outside of Malaysia, such as Iran (Abbasi et al., 2016; Eslami et al., 2014; & Madahi et al., 2013), India (Lavalekar, et al., 2010; Mary & Andhikari, 2012), Pakistan (Batool & Khalid, 2012), the United States of America (Bracket et al., 2005), Australia (Smith, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2008), Romania (Anghels, 2016), Turkey (Yedirir & Hamarta, 2015), Croatia (Cikes, Maric, & Sincek, 2018) and Germany (Schroder-Abe & Schutz, 2011).

Notably, limited research is conducted examining the relationship between emotional intelligence on marital and relationship satisfaction in Malaysia. Furthermore, since divorce cases in Malaysia are on the rise, this concerning trend necessitates more profound research into factors influencing marriage, with emotional intelligence being one of the most crucial factors to be considered. Therefore, the importance of researching these topics in Malaysia is to contribute to the existing literature and fill the empirical gap by providing empirical evidence on the role of emotional intelligence toward marital and relationship satisfaction.

Thus, this study aims to identify the relationship between emotional intelligence on marital and relationship satisfaction

among married couples in Johor Bahru, Malaysia.

Method

Participants

A total of 142 (23 male, 119 female) married individuals who live in Johor Bahru participated in this study. The link to the questionnaire was shared on researchers' social networking sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter. An invitation to participate in the survey was posted on the social media platform by highlighting the married couples as the targeted respondents to participate in this study. Respondents were also asked to refer their friends and spouse to participate in the study.

Measuring Instruments

A measure of emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence was measured using an ability theory of emotional intelligence developed by Schutte, Malouff, and Bhullar (2009). The questionnaire consists of four dimensions of emotional ability: emotional perception, facilitation of thoughts, emotional understanding, and emotional management. The questionnaire utilized 5-point Likert Scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). According to Schutte et al. (2009), the reliability for assessing the emotion scale is 0.90, and the scale also showed a strong convergent validity.

A measure of relationship satisfaction

The relationship satisfaction was assessed by the Relationship Assessment Scale developed by Hendrick (1988). The questionnaire measures generic relationship satisfaction among married couples. Respondents were asked to evaluate their current relationship satisfaction based on a 5-point scale (ranging from very low to very high). The reliability of this relationship assessment scale is 0.87, which is very good when referred to the level of reliability.

A measure of marital satisfaction

Marital satisfaction was measured by the Marital Satisfaction Scale adopted from Fowers and Olson (1993). The questionnaire consists of 15 items, including the two dimensions, which have positive and negative items. Positive items include questions 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, and 15, while negative items consist of 2, 5,

8, 9, 12, and 14. The questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert Scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). The reliability of this scale is 0.86, which is considered good, and the validity scale is 0.71.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 shows that the mean age of respondents is 32.70 years old. The majority of the respondents are female (83.8%) and Malay (95.8%). The mean duration of marriage and number of children are seven years and two children.

Table 1

Demographic Information (n=142 respondents)

Demographic information	Mean(SD, min-max)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	32.70 (8.19, 20-60)		
Gender			
Male		23	16.2
Female		119	83.8
Ethnic Background			
Malay			
Chinese		136	95.8
Indian		2	1.4
Others		2	1.4
		2	1.4
Duration of Marriage (years)	7		
Mean (SD, min-max)	(6.57, 1-29)		
Number of Children	2 (1-7)		
Mean (min-max)			

Level of emotional intelligence, marital satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction among married couples in Johor Bahru.

The overall mean score of emotional intelligence is 3.87, which portrays a high level of emotional intelligence. Meanwhile, the overall mean score of marital satisfaction is 3.67, which indicate a moderately level of marital satisfaction. Furthermore, the overall mean score of relationship satisfaction is 3.83, which shows a high level of relationship satisfaction.

Relationship between emotional intelligence, marital satisfaction, and

relationship satisfaction among married couples in Johor Bahru

Table 2 presents the correlations analysis between emotional intelligence, marital, and relationship satisfaction among married couples in Johor Bahru. For the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction, the findings demonstrated a weak, positive relationship between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction ($r=0.338$, $p<0.005$). An increase in emotional intelligence was correlated with an increase in marital satisfaction.

Similarly, the findings demonstrated a weak, positive relationship between emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction ($r=0.383$, $p<0.05$). An increase in emotional intelligence was correlated with an increase in relationship satisfaction among married couples.

Table 2

Correlations among emotional intelligence, marital and relationship satisfaction

Variable	Marital Satisfaction		Relationship Satisfaction	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Emotional Intelligence	0.338*	0.001	0.383*	0.001

Notes. * $p < .05$.

Discussion

These study findings showed that most married couples in Johor Bahru have a high level of emotional intelligence. According to Eslami et al. (2014), people with a high level of emotional intelligence have better social coordination and self-control. When people are aware and acknowledge their emotional state, they are more likely to control their emotions and direct them positively. For example, when they are

aware that they feel angry, they will try to manage it and shift into positive moods indirectly to avoid affecting others.

The study's findings showed that respondents have a moderate level of marital satisfaction and a high level of relationship satisfaction. This notion might be due to the number of time spent together. The average mean of marriage duration among the married couples in this study is

seven years indicating ample time togetherness and understanding each other better, which helps elevate their marital and relationship satisfaction. Further, married couples could have an effective communication strategy to resolve any conflict that results in greater satisfaction.

The results from this study showed there is a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and marital and relationship satisfaction. The finding on marital satisfaction is consistent with other studies conducted in Iran (Abbasi et al., 2016; Eslami et al., 2014), India (Lavalekar et al., 2010; Mary & Andhikari, 2012), Pakistan (Batool & Khalid, 2012), Romania (Anghel, 2016) and Turkey (Yedirir & Hamarta, 2015). Similarly, the notion that emotional intelligence associate with relationship satisfaction was supported by other studies conducted in Iran (Madahi et al., 2013; Koohsar & Bonab, 2011), Australia (Smith et al., 2008), Germany (Schroder-Abe & Schutz, 2011), and the United States of America (Brackett et al., 2005; Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003). The spouse with good emotional intelligence depicts a more significant ability to understand and manage their partner's emotions, resulting in greater marital and relationship satisfaction. Cikes et al. (2018) mentioned that if a person understands their partner's various emotional states, they will regulate their own and their partner's negative emotional states. When a spouse can understand a partner's emotions and control their negative emotions, it will reduce any potential issue in a marriage. Most of the fights or arguments between husband and wife occur because they do not control their negative emotion. According to Schutte, Mallouf, Bobik, Coston, Greeson, and Jedlicka (2001), people who can observe and understand their partner's thoughts and feelings may be more benign or positive in their communication habits, especially during times of conflict. The ability of married individuals to facilitate their emotions very well will lead to greater satisfaction in their own marital life.

Limitations and Recommendations

First and foremost, the respondents are from the Johor Bahru area only and do not cover any other region in Malaysia. Thus, the results of this current research might not represent the whole population in Malaysia. Therefore, the result of the study cannot be generalized as it might be different due to demographic differences.

The second limitation of this study is using self-report questionnaires, which made it unable to assess the exact feelings of marital and relationship satisfaction among the married couples. Also, the influence of the compounding factors, such as the participants' current emotional state or personality, may be present, leading to inaccurate answers.

The researchers would like to recommend that the target population for future research be broadened so that the findings can represent the larger population. Besides, a larger sample size could result in more reliable conclusions and be generalized, which may benefit the target population in the future. In addition, similar research is conducted in a mix-method or qualitative design to understand the topics better.

Conclusion

To conclude, married couples in Johor Bahru have a high level of emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction and a moderate level of marital satisfaction. Also, this study found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital and relationship satisfaction among married couples in Johor Bahru. Married couples may enhance and improve their effective communication strategy and conflict resolution skills to gain mutual understanding in order to have greater marital and relationship satisfaction within their marriage.

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