



Research Paper: Investigating the Relationship between Self-control and Perceived Social Support with Marital Intimacy among Married Female Students



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Abstract

The family is considered the first social institution created by marriage. One of the outstanding features of a successful marriage is the intimacy between spouses. The present study aims to investigate the relationship between self-control and perceived social support with marital intimacy among female students. The study was descriptive-correlational, and the statistical population consisted of married female students of Azad University, North Tehran Branch during 2018-2019. The statistical sample was selected by simple random sampling method from among 150 married female students. To collect data, Marital Intimacy Questionnaire (MIQ) and Self-Control Questionnaire (SCQ) and The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) were used. Pearson correlation coefficient and Multiple Linear Regression were used to analyze the data using SPSS-23 software. It was found that a significant positive relationship exists between marital intimacy and perceived social support and self-control in married female students. Further, there is a positive and significant relationship between marital intimacy and self-control. Increasing social support and self-control can improve some aspects of marital intimacy.

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1. Introduction

The existence of healthy and constructive interactions and the establishment of love between them and expressing intimacy to each other is considered as one of the signs of human social life (Kōu & Bailey, 2017). It is based on marriage between the couples. According to Hu, Jiang and Wang (2019), a healthy marriage has several elements such as intimacy, commitment, marital satisfaction and relationship, as well as the absence of elements such as violence and infidelity. Gonczarowski, Nisan, Ostrovsky, & Rosenbaum, (2019) found that intimacy is a very valuable and important issue in marriage which contributes to the stability and strength of relationships between the couples. The study of Shahrestany, Doustkam, Rahbardar and Mashhadi (2012) indicated that intimacy makes couples' relationships more stable and stronger and increases their marital compatibility and satisfaction. The concept of intimacy has been considered as an important instrument in the dynamics of the marital relationship during recent years (Conroy et al., 2016., Ferreira, Narciso, Nova, 2013., Madanian, Syed Mansor, Bin Omar, 2012., Patrick, Beckenbach, 2009). The need for intimacy includes the need for physical closeness, bonding and contact with other people (Bagarozzi, 2013). The couples' intimacy plays an inevitable role in meeting the needs of both parties and helps maintain couples' health in various aspects of life (Prager, 2009., Reis, Franks, 1994., Ryff, Singer, 2003)., Therefore, it is necessary to conduct some research on marital intimacy due to its importance in the health and well-being of couples.

The need to establish and maintain close ties and relationships with others is

considered as a fundamental human motivation (Fathollahzadeh, Mirseififar, Kazemi, Saadati, & Navabi Nejad, 2017) Marriage between the couples shapes the family system, which is the most important social system (Nowruzi, Rezakhani, & Vakili, 2019). Intimacy is considered as one of the most important characteristics of a successful marriage while the marital relationship will be disturbed (Cao, Zhou, Fang, & Fine, 2017). Comparing the reasons for marriage in the past to that in the recent years showed that people marry their spouses today because of the need for love and intimacy and access to emotional-psychological needs (Francis, & Meyerson, 2017). Therefore, dissatisfaction with the needs can increase conflicts, reduce marital satisfaction and cause emotional and psychological problems (John, Seme, Roro & Tsui, 2017). Intimacy refers to the emotional, intellectual, social, physical, and spiritual integration into each other's lives, and most people recognize marriage as one of the most intimate relationships between adults (Levinger & Huston, 1990). An intimate relationship that includes caring, mutual trust, and acceptance can play an important role in family stability and marital relationships (Stahmann, 2004). Since establishing and maintaining intimate relationships in marriage is very important and the factors such as a person's mental health and previous experiences can overshadow it, it can still be influenced by intervention methods. "Self-control" is an internal force which allows a person to resist various temptations and thus the person can control his/her behavior in exchange for changing environmental conditions (Bandura, 2005). The low level of this trait in the individual makes it difficult for the individual to control his

impulses, leading to mental damage (Alizadeh, 2005). Psychologists found that volition is an important part of a person's personality, thus self-control, as one of the components of volition, plays an important role in determining people's behavior, and its absence results in serious problems for the person (Sheibat-zadeh & Peyavastegar, 2016).

Numerous psychosocial factors affect the quality of life of individuals, one of which is perceived social support. As one of the emotional coping mechanisms, social support has the potential to affect the quality of life (Ersoy-Kart & Güldü, 2005). Understanding the support of receiving is much more important. In other words, the patient's perception and attitude towards the received support is more important than the amount of support provided to her (Helgeston & Cohen, 1996). Tracy's findings indicated that understanding social support prevents the adverse physiological effects of the disease in the individual, increases self-care and self-confidence, and has a positive effect on the physical, mental and social condition of the individual. Furthermore, it increases performance and improves the quality of life (Yu, Lee, & Woo, 2004, Chan, Molassiotis, Yam, Chang & Lam, 2004., Lee, Yae Chung, Boog Park & Hong Chung, 2004).

Social support is the degree of intimacy, companionship and attention of family members, friends and other people (Charyton, Elliott, Lu & Moore, 2009). Perceived social support is the amount of access and the individual's perception of the availability of support from others (Calvete & Connor-Smith, 2006). Understanding support for the receiver is more important. Since the person believes that when he/she

faces problems or is under pressure, there are some people who help him and thus resists against adversity with more strength (Bakhtiyari, Emaminaeini, Hatami, KhodaKari & Sahaf, 2017). However, the lack of its understanding leads to social isolation and even death (Brummett et al., 2005).

Generally, the marital relationship is considered as the closest and most emotional relationship people develop, and understanding marital intimacy is necessary for its maintenance. Accordingly, studying the related variables and explaining marital intimacy is of interest to researchers. However, the role of self-control as an individual variable and social support as a social contributing force in marital intimacy between Iranian married couples have not been addressed in the previous studies. Therefore, the present study aims to bridge this gap by combining both variables of self-control and social support in a regression model to investigate the explanatory role of the combination of two personality and social variables. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between such variables and their explanatory role in a marital intimacy.

2. Method

The method used in this study is based on the purposeful sampling, and the design of the study is correlational. The statistical population consisted of all married female students between 20-40 years in North Tehran Azad University who were studying in the academic year 2018-2019. One hundred fifty of them were selected by simple random sampling, and the questionnaires were distributed among them. Inclusion criteria included informed consent to participate in the study, no

history of divorce, drug or alcohol addiction, and no specific mental disorder (according to participants). Additionally, the exclusion criteria included requesting to cancel filling out the questionnaires when answering and not answering 10% of the items in each questionnaire or more. The following questionnaires were administered in the present study:

Couples Intimacy Questionnaire: This questionnaire was developed by Van den Broucke, Vertommen and Vandereycken (1995), consisting of 56 items which measures five indicators of intimacy in marriage. The indicators consist of intimacy index (issues and problems related to intimacy) with 14 options; the couple agreed with 12 options and were honest with 12 options, loving each other with 8 options, and the degree of adherence to commitments with 10 options. Table 1 displays the validity of the questionnaire based on Van den Broucke et al.'s research in 1995 and Erfani-Akbari in 2008. In this study, the reliability coefficient based on Van den Broucke's opinion for each subscale was as follows: Intimacy subscale, agreement, honesty, love and affection, and adherence to commitments as 86%, 86%, 83%, 82%, and 72%, respectively. However, Erfani-Akbari (2008) found that the reliability coefficient was as follows: The subscale of intimacy, agreement, honesty, love and affection and adherence to commitments as 86%, 97%, 87%, 80% and 87%, respectively.

In this research, the total reliability coefficient was 92% as follows: intimacy, couple's agreement, honesty, love and affection, and adherence to commitments were 69%, 84%, 67%, 83%, and 70%, respectively.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support: This scale was developed in 1988 by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley. It has 12 items that measure people's perception of social support received from three sources: the family, friends and important people in life. The level of agreement of individuals was measured through Likert scale which has five degrees from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The minimum and maximum possible scores were 12 and 60, respectively. Zimet et al (1988) reported the alpha coefficient of this questionnaire in the range of 85%-91%. In Iran, Salimi, Jokar and .Nikpour (2009) examined the validity and reliability of this scale. They found that the reliability coefficient was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha method for each dimension of 86%, 82% and 86% and the validity was confirmed by factor analysis. In addition, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire in this study was 92%.

Tangney's Self-control Questionnaire: This questionnaire has 13 questions aimed to measure the extent of people's control over themselves. Scoring is based on the Likert scale. The maximum and minimum scores for Tangney self-control questionnaire are 65 and 13, respectively. A high score indicates higher self-control, and vice versa. In Tangney, Baumeister and Boone (2004), the validity of this scale has been confirmed by assessing its correlation with the scales of academic achievement, adjustment, positive relationships and interpersonal skills. In addition, its reliability on the statistical sample using Cronbach's alpha test was 83%. Additionally, the value reliability of the questionnaire in this study based on Cronbach's alpha was 69%.

To analyze the research information, SPSS software version 23 was employed. Pearson correlation coefficient and multivariate regression analysis were run to test the research hypotheses simultaneously.

3. Results

To investigating the relationship between perceived social support and marital intimacy of couples and its dimensions, Pearson correlation coefficient was used, the results of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Pearson correlation coefficient of study variables

Variable	Social support	Self-control
Marital intimacy of couples	0.384**	0.162*
Intimacy	0.393**	0.127
level of agreement of the couple	0.279**	0.228**
degree of honesty	0.277**	0.154
love and affection for each other	0.294**	0.159*
Adherence to commitments	0.249	0.016

**= sig< 0.05 and *= sig< 0.05

As shown in Table 1, there was a positive and significant relationship between marital intimacy and all its subscales except for adherence to commitments with perceived social support at the level of 0.01. Moreover, the results tabulated in Table 1 indicated that the element of social support significantly correlated with the subscale of intimacy with the highest coefficient equaled to 0.393 and had the lowest significant correlation coefficient with degree of honesty as 0.277. As illustrated in Table 1, there was a positive and significant relationship between marital intimacy of couples, subscales of marital agreement, love and affection for each other with self-control at the level of 0.05. Also, there was a positive correlation between self-control

and the subscale of level of agreement of the couples at the level of 0.01. However, self-control was not significantly related to the subscales of intimacy, honesty, and commitment. In addition to the results tabulated in Table 1, the variable of self-control had the highest significant correlation with the subscales of the level of agreement of the couples at the level of 0.228. It had the lowest significant correlation with love and affection for each other at the level of 0.159.

To explain the role of each predictor variable in the criterion variables (marital intimacy of couples and its subscales), multiple linear regression (enter method) was used (Table 2).

Table 2

The results multiple linear regression (enter method) of perceived social support and self-control over marital intimacy of couples

Predictive variables	R	R ²	B	SD	Beta	T	Sig
Perceived Social Support	0.359	0.129	0.714	0.170	0.328	4.191	0.000
Self-control			0.365	0.312	0.092	1.171	0.243

Table 2 revealed that perceived social support value was 0.33 which was influential in marital intimacy. However, self-control did not predict the marital intimacy of the couple. In addition, the value of R^2 is 0.13, i.e., about 13% of the variance of marital intimacy of couples can

be explained and predicted based on independent variables, and thus the prediction is positive and significant.

The results of regression analysis to study predictability of perceived social support on intimacy are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

The regression results of perceived social support on intimacy

Predictive variables	R	R^2	B	SD	Beta	T	Sig
Constant	0.393	0.155	27.836	1.778		15.652	0.000
Perceived Social Support			0.223	0.043	0.393	5.226	0.000

As shown in Table 3, approximately 16% of the variance of intimacy can be explained and predicted based on the perceived social support variable, and thus the prediction is positive and significant with a coefficient of 0.39.

The regression analysis was used to explain the role of predictor variables (perceived social support and self-control) in the criterion variable (couple agreement), the results of which are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

The results multiple liner regression (enter method) of perceived social support and self-control on the level of couple's agreement

Predictive variables	R	R^2	B	SD	Beta	T	Sig
Perceived Social Support	0.328	0.107	0.139	0.046	0.241	3.046	0.003
Self-control			0.185	0.084	0.176	2.218	0.028

Table 4 demonstrated that 11% of the level of agreement of the couples could be predicted by independent variables. Both predictor variables had positive and significant linear relationship. Moreover, according to Table 4, the effectiveness level of perceived social support and self-control were 0.24 and 0.18 respectively.

Table 5 shows the result of multiple linear regression analysis of perceived social support on the degree of honesty in which self-control variable is not included in regression analysis since it has no relationship with the degree of honesty between couples.

Table 5

The results of multiple linear regression of perceived social support on the degree of honesty

Predictive variables	R	R^2	B	SD	Beta	T	Sig
Constant	0.277	0.077	26.860	1.595		16.842	0.000
Perceived Social Support			0.135	0.038	0.277	3.535	0.001

Based on [Table 5](#), 8% of the level of honesty variance was predictable by level of perceived social support. Additionally, the level of effectiveness of social support on the honesty subscale was roughly equal to 0.28 and was positive.

In [Table 6](#), the result of multiple linear regression (enter method) is illustrated to determine the role of the predictor variable in the love and affection for each other subscale.

Table 6

The results multiple liner regression (enter method) of perceived social support and self-control over the level of love and affection

Predictive variables	R	R ²	B	SD	Beta	T	Sig
Perceived Social Support	0.310	0.096	0.115	0.034	0.273	3.418	0.001
Self-control			0.078	0.062	0.101	1.267	0.207

The variable of perceived social support was able to predict love and affection for each other at 0.27, while the variable of self-control could not predict love and affection for each other ([Table 6](#)). On the whole, predictor variables could predict 10% of variance of intimacy between couples.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between self-control and perceived social support with marital intimacy among married female students of North Tehran Azad University. In this study, it was found that there is a positive and significant relationship between perceived social support and marital intimacy of couples and all its dimensions except adherence to commitment. Therefore, the greater the perceived social support of married women, the more their marital intimacy is overshadowed and increased. [Qamari, Rezakhani, & Malalo \(2014\)](#) conducted a study among married people who were employed in Tehran

Social Security Organization, and found that there is a negative and significant relationship between the components of perceived social support and the components of marital boredom. In addition, [Asayesh, Hesam, Ghorbani, Shariati & Nasiri, \(2011\)](#) found that perceived social support by the family explains and predicts 23% of mental health changes. This is due to the importance of loving family, important people and friends in one's life. In addition, since a person spends a lot of time with other people, perceived social support can have a great impact on one's marital intimacy

In addition, the results show there is a positive and significant relationship between self-control and marital intimacy of couples and subscales of couples' agreement, love and affection for each other. Therefore, as self-control increases, marital intimacy of couples and their agreement, love and affection for each other increase. That is, the more a person can express his/her feelings and behaviors in

critical situations, the more the marital intimacy between them is affected and increased. It was found that the relative inability to control impulse leads to high-risk emotional and sexual behaviors, as well as overeating and drinking behavior in couples (Bakhtiyari et al., 2017). In addition, the relationship between self-control and marital commitment was examined, finding that men and women who scored lower on impulse control and had lower levels of inhibition were more likely to engage in extramarital affairs. In addition, it was reported that people who are more desirable to betray have more negative emotions. (Mark, Janssen & Milhausen, 2011). Brown (2001) indicated that since insecure people have the characteristic of being too involved in intimate relationships, they are dependent on others for valuable feeling. As the weakness of self-control and control over their emotions and desires (self-control) are interfered, they can engage in emotional relationships outside the framework of cohabitation and undermine their marital commitment and intimacy.

The results of the present study showed that perceived social support could significantly predict marital intimacy of couples. However, self-control did not predict their marital intimacy. The research literature of married students is extensive in this field, including Shariati, Qamrani, Solati Dehkordi & Abbasi Molid (2010), Saemi, Besharat, AsgharnejadFarid (2019), Alahdad, Alavi, Ninggal, & Mirzaei (2014), Khazaei, Rostami & Zaryabi (2011), Tariveh, Karimi, Akbari & Moradi (2020), Ahmadian & Haghayegh (2020). Mitchell et al. (2008) identified predictors of marital

intimacy as self-disclosure and self-knowledge as well as self-control.

Similarly, this research had some limitations. Time and economic constraints made this research inevitably carry out within a city and a gender. Undoubtedly, considering the wider statistical population in the case of both genders can lead to a greater generalizability of the results obtained throughout the country. Based on the studies on the title or topic of this research with its three variables, no research project has been found so far; and unfortunately, this made it impossible to compare the results with those of the previous ones. In addition, not enough research resources existed in this study. Considering the relationship between marital intimacy and perceived social support among married women, it is suggested that teaching marital life skills to couples be on the agenda of the relevant agencies to observe the improvement of the marital satisfaction in families. Furthermore, considering the relationship between marital intimacy and perceived social support in women and practical planning for its achievement is required. It seems that despite the relative increase in the level of literacy in society, people are still not familiar with important concepts such as intimacy in married life and attribute it to satisfaction and underestimate the importance of an important factor such as intimacy. For this reason, public education at the community level is required to realize that the purpose of marriage is not just one-sided satisfaction and that more factors are involved in the couple's life. It is suggested that a separate study of each concept be performed without

generalizing their meanings to help identify the details of marital life.

5. Conclusion

The results of the present study revealed that increase in the perceived social support and self-control correlated with the increase in the intimacy between couples. Moreover, perceived social support could predict the intimacy between couples. Therefore, counselors and psychologists in counselling centers should develop educational programs to teach the couples perceived social support and self-control in order to promote these traits.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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