

## Relationships Between Emotional Regulation and Marital Satisfaction

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### Abstract

Emotion is one of the important psychological variables studied in exploring psychological well-being of married individuals. The aim of this research is to identify the relationships between emotional regulation and marital satisfaction among married couples. This study adapts the exploratory study research design using questionnaires. DERS-18 and ENRICH marital satisfaction scale were applied to measure both variables. Questions regarding personal background were also presented to identify the participants. Questionnaires were distributed to participants residing in seven districts with the area of Hulu Langat, Selangor, Malaysia to enable researcher in achieving the objective of this study. Data from collected questionnaires were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 software. Results show that there is a positive and significant relationship between emotional regulation, specifically, *awareness*, and marital satisfaction ( $r = 0.24^{**}$ ,  $n = 304$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Implication of this study suggests that the ability of married individuals to regulate emotions have important relationships in achieving marital satisfaction. Future studies need to focus on examining variety aspects and domains of regulation emotion to understand this phenomenon within marital well-being better. Implication of this study were also discussed from the field of psychology and also practical aspects for helping professions working with married couples.

**Keywords:** Emotional, Regulation, Marital, Satisfaction, Couples

### Introduction

Marital satisfaction is one of the most important variables being studied among researchers who seek to understand the psychological well-being among married individuals. As a result of marital satisfaction being impactful to the married individual, spouse, children, and other aspects of life such as workplace productivity, it has been studied since the early times (Ferguson, 1938; Line, 1939; McLean, 1939) and still until recent years (Al-Krenawi, & Bell, 2023; Dong et al., 2022; Kazim, & Rafique, 2021). Hence, marital satisfaction is still being

researched on until today due to the positive or negative impact it has on the lives of married individuals. For instance, marital satisfaction has been studied with other important variables such as how it is related to psychological health (Alipour et al., 2020), mental health Fernandes-Pires et al (2023), marital quality and physical health (Novak et al., 2023), life satisfaction Al-Krenawi & Bell (2023), parenting Brown et al (2020); Lau et al (2020); Mousavi et al (2020); Yoyo et al (2020), stress Shi, & Whisman (2023), depression Dong et al (2022); Effati-Daryani et al (2020), anxiety Postler et al (2022), children's academic performance Lui et al (2020), sexuality A Shahnin et al (2021); Bafrani et al (2023), mother's parenting stress Dong et al (2022), marital conflict (Dong et al., 2022), individualistic and collectivistic cultures Kazim, & Rafique (2021), conflict resolution style Ünal & Akgün (2022) and occupational health (Wang, 2021).

Hence, there is a growing amount of research to this date that focuses on studying emotions and marital satisfaction. As a result, much research focusing on marital satisfaction has chosen the emotion aspect (Duca, 2023). For instance, some examples of research focusing on married individuals are marital studies focusing on emotional functioning Kurşuncu, & Sümer (2023), cognitive emotional regulation (Amini et al., 2023), family emotional functioning Kurşuncu & Sümer (2023) emotion dysregulation and marital burnout (Zamani et al, 2023), emotional divorce Ghaibi et al (2022), emotional regulation Besharat (2021); Riahi et al (2020), positive resonance Otero (2020), emotional intelligence Hajihassani & Sim (2019); Milani et al (2020), emotion-focused couple therapy Asadi et al (2020) and childhood emotional maltreatment (Liu et al., 2019). Results from these studies strongly suggest the importance and relationship between emotion and marital satisfaction. Therefore, this aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between emotional regulation and marital satisfaction among married individuals among married couples.

## **Method**

### ***Research design***

This study applied exploratory research design using survey methods and questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections in which the first section contained personal background questions, followed by emotional regulation, and marital satisfaction questions.

### ***Sample and Sampling***

The sample in this study consisted of individuals who are Malaysian, literate, married at least year and residing within the area of Hulu Langat, Selangor. Hulu Langat has seven districts namely Ampang, Beranang, Cheras, Ulu Langat, Ulu Semenyih, Semenyih dan Kajang. Participants in this study were selected using the cluster sampling. Questionnaires were distributed according to seven districts. Participants who agreed to participate in this study signed the informed consent upon completing the questionnaires.

### ***Questionnaire***

There were three important sections in the questionnaire distributed to participants in this study. The first section comprised of questions relating to the respondent's personal background such as sex, ethnic group, age, level of education level, total years of marriage, total number of children and physical status of marriage.

The second section consisted of questions on emotional regulation. *Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale* (DERS-18) by Victor and Klonsky (2016) were used to measure emotional

regulation among respondents in this study. This scale measured participants' ability to identify, accept and manage their emotional experiences. This scale is composed of 18 items with six components of emotional regulation namely *awareness*, *clarity*, *goals*, *impulse*, *nonacceptance*, and *strategies*. Each component has three items to measure emotional regulation components. This scale is measured using 5 Likert scale to indicate respondents' agreement to the item presented which "1" indicate "almost having no experience" and "5" shows respondent's "most frequent experience". Researcher applied the manual for calculation and interpretation for DERS-18 (Victor & Klonsky, 2016). In this study, DERS-18 was translated to Malay language. The scale went through back-to-back translation by certified translators. The third section contained questions relating to marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction was measured using ENRICH Marital satisfaction scale (Fowers & Olson, 1993). This scale mainly consisted of two main scales, namely marital satisfaction, and idealistic distortion scale. Marital satisfaction scale measured on issues relating to marital satisfaction such as personality, decision making, communication, sexual relations, and parenting. Whereas idealistic distortion scale consisted of five items measuring the unrealistic perfection thoughts about marriage. For example, "My partner and I understand each other perfectly". Idealistic distortion scale moderates the score for marital satisfaction. The final scores for marital satisfaction followed the manual as suggested by (Fowers and Olson, 1993).

### **Analysis**

All completed questionnaires were collected from participants and analyzed. The questionnaires were coded and analyzed using *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*, IBM SPSS Statistics, version 25. Frequency and percentage analysis were run to identify the background of respondents involved in this study. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis was used to determine emotional regulation (awareness, clarity, goals, impulse, nonacceptance and strategies) and marital satisfaction.

### **Results**

#### *Descriptive Statistical Results*

A number of 304 respondents volunteered to participate in this study. More than half of respondents were females (57.2%) and remaining were males (42.8%). Majority of respondents consisted of Malays (62.5%) followed by Indians (18.8%) and least were from category of others (2.3%). Most respondents were between the age of 41-50 years old (34.2%) followed by category of age 31-40 years old (32.9%). The least respondents came from 51-55 years old. Most of respondents possessed Diploma level of education (38.5%) followed by Malaysian Higher Certificate Education (MHCE/ STPM) 34.2%. About 29.6% of respondents are from six to 10 years of marriage followed by 11-15 years of marriage (24.7%). Least were from 16-20 years of marriage (14.1%). About 22.7% number of respondents have three children and followed by 6.3% respondents have two children.

Table 4.1  
*Background Profile of Respondents*

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	130	42.8
	<b>Female</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>57.2</b>
Ethnic	<b>Malay</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>62.5</b>
	Chinese	50	16.4
	Indian	57	18.8
	Others	7	2.3
Age	18-30 years old	55	18.1
	31-40 years old	100	32.9
	<b>41-50 years old</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>34.2</b>
	51-55 years old	45	14.8
Level of Education	Malaysian Certificate Examination (MCE/SPM)/ Malaysian Higher Certificate Education (MHCE/ STPM)	104	34.2
	<b>Diploma</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>38.5</b>
	Undergraduate/Postgraduate	83	27.3
Total Years of Marriage	1-5 years	51	16.8
	<b>6-10 years</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>29.6</b>
	11-15 years	75	24.7
	16-20 years	43	14.1
	21 years and above	45	14.8
Total number of children	0	19	6.3
	1	34	11.2
	2	60	19.7
	<b>3</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>22.7</b>
	4	53	17.4
	5	35	11.5
	6 and above	34	11.2
Status	Long distance	107	35.2
	<b>Within one household</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>64.8</b>
Total		304	100

#### *Inferential Statistical Results*

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis were carried out between subscales of emotional regulation (*awareness, clarity, goals, impulse, nonacceptance and strategies*) and marital satisfaction. Results showed that there is a positive significant

relationship between *awareness* and marital satisfaction ( $r = 0.24^{**}$ ,  $n = 304$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). However, there is no significant positive relationship between goals ( $r = 0.06$ ,  $n = 304$ ,  $p = 0.328$ ), nonacceptance ( $r = 0.17$ ,  $n = 304$ ,  $r = 0.765$ ) and strategies ( $r = 0.14$ ,  $n = 304$ ,  $p = 0.813$ ) with marital satisfaction. On the other hand, there is also no significant negative relationships between clarity ( $r = -0.01$ ,  $n = 304$ ,  $p = 0.855$ ), impulse ( $r = -0.01$ ,  $n = 304$ ,  $p = 0.830$ ) and marital satisfaction. Overall, there is only one significant relationship between emotional regulation component, specifically, *awareness* and marital satisfaction. The more awareness a respondent scores, the higher marital satisfaction a participant experience.

Table 2

*Correlation between Emotional Regulation and Marital Satisfaction.*

	r	P	N
<b>Emotional Regulation</b>			
1. Awareness	0.24**	0.00	304
2. Clarity	-0.01	0.86	304
3. Goals	0.06	0.33	304
4. Impulse	-0.01	0.83	304
5. Nonacceptance	0.17	0.77	304
6. Strategies	0.14	0.81	304

\*Correlation significant at 0.01

## Discussion

This study suggests that there is an important relationship between regulation of emotions, specifically, *awareness* and marital satisfaction. *Awareness* in this study includes paying attention, being attentive and acknowledging the occurrence of feelings and emotions that an individual experiences. All elements within *awareness* are crucial in enabling healthy and positive communication within marital satisfaction. The psychological well-being of marriage, namely, marital satisfaction, consists of various aspects which are directly related to daily activities in daily married life. This includes many important aspects of daily activities that will affect married individuals' emotional dynamics. Moreover, if the emotions that married individuals are experiencing are strong and negative, it may directly affect one's daily activities and psychological well-being. The daily activities include interaction between spouses that involves various aspects such as handling roles and responsibilities, decision making and resolving conflicts, parenting, financial decision, dealing with parents, in laws and friends' relationships, spending time and leisure activities together, expressing affection and sexual relationships and implementing religious values and values. Findings in this study also support previous studies on the importance of emotional regulation, specifically, *awareness*, and marital satisfaction. For example, studies investigating specifically on emotional regulation and marital satisfaction in sexual and intimacy (Fischer et al., 2022), positive dyadic outcome (Rusu et al, 2019), maladaptive schemas and marital problems (Besharat et al, 2021). Although awareness was found to be positively significant related to marital satisfaction, more studies on emotional regulation and marital satisfaction should be carried out in future.

## Conclusion

In summary, findings indicated the importance of emotional regulation in relation to achieving marital satisfaction. Implication of this study suggests that the ability of married individuals to regulate emotions have important relationships in achieving marital

satisfaction. Future studies need to be carried out focussing on regulation emotion when studying marital relationships such as marital satisfaction. This may also be carried out by increasing the number of samples to enable more complex analysis. Besides that, variety of scales in measuring the dynamics of emotions in helping researchers understand the nature of emotions experienced by married individuals. Furthermore, results from studies focussing on emotional regulation and marital satisfaction may also benefit professional practitioners such as counsellors and therapist working with married couples. This may help module developers to formulate manual or programs in helping married couples in need to manage and regulate their emotions. Future studies should focus more on exploring and examining emotional regulation in helping maintain a healthy marital satisfaction.

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