

Marital satisfaction among families living with parents-in-law: The role of marital adjustment and religiosity

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received July 27, 2021
Revised December 01, 2021
Accepted March 10, 2022

Keywords

marital adjustment;
marital satisfaction;
religiosity.

ABSTRACT

New families living with parents-in-law are facing a challenging marital satisfaction issue. This study aimed to determine the effect of marital adjustment and religiosity on marital satisfaction simultaneously and partially. This quantitative study employs data collection techniques using marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, and religiosity scales. 90 Muslim husbands or wives who lived in their parents-in-law's houses participated in this study. Participants' characteristics were fewer than five years of marriage, first marriage, and living in the Pamekasan Regency. Multiple linear regression was used to test hypotheses. The result shows a significant effect of marital adjustment and religiosity on marital satisfaction. While partially, the marital adjustment has a significant effect on marital satisfaction. Whereas religiosity also has a significant effect on marital satisfaction. Even though marital adjustment and religiosity affect marital satisfaction simultaneously, marital adjustment partially affects marital satisfaction higher than that of religiosity. As an implication, families living with parents-in-law need to enhance their marital adjustment to achieve marital satisfaction.

Introduction

Marriage is regarded as a form of worship in Islam, as stated in Surah Ar-Rum: 21 of the Qur'an, which means "and among His signs (of greatness) is that He created partners/spouse for you from your kind, so you tend to and feel at ease with them, and He made between you love and compassion. In that, there are indeed signs (of Allah's greatness) for a people who think" (Ar-Rum; 21). Allah demonstrates His greatness by creating human beings in pairs of their kind so that their souls become calm and at peace with each other. Every married couple hopes for a harmonious marriage to feel the most comfort, peace, and self-actualization (Srisusanti & Zulkaida, 2013).

In developmental psychology, marriage is one of the developmental tasks of early adulthood (Hurlock, 2003; Santrock, 2014). Most newlywed Indonesian couples choose to live with their parents or in-laws (Lestari, 2012). Their reasons for living with parents or parents-in-law include financial barriers or parents' requests to be accompanied (Haryati, 2017). Especially in Pamekasan Regency, like the rest of Madura, has a matrilineal marriage culture in which newly married couples live with the woman's parents in the same house (Sa'dan, 2016). However, Azis (2017) argues that this culture is not absolute and must be followed by all married couples, especially in the current era. A husband may bring his wife to live apart from his parents as part of his responsibility and as a husband who has complete control over the responsibility for providing physical and spiritual support for his children and wife (Sa'dan, 2016).

Previous studies on the marital satisfaction of couples living with their parents or parents-in-law found differences in marital satisfaction between couples living together and couples living separated from their parents or parents-in-law. A couple who lives in the same house as their in-laws experience hardship in marital satisfaction (Saputra et al., 2014). Couples who live apart from their parents or parents-in-law report higher levels of satisfaction and happiness because there is no direct intervention from them (Muhid et al., 2019).

Every couple united in marriage expects good qualities that will lead to marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction refers to a couple's subjective feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and enjoyment in their married life (Olson et al., 2011). Marital satisfaction focuses on the quality of the marriage rather than marital stability, which is thought to be one of the main reasons for divorce (Li & Fung, 2011). Married couples who achieve marital satisfaction are more likely to stay married, despite the strong personal factors that drive the marriage (García & Gómez, 2014). Meanwhile, if marital satisfaction is disrupted, the dynamics of social relationships between husband and wife will also be disrupted (Navid et al., 2018).

Two factors influence marital satisfaction, including factors that existed before the marriage and those that existed after the marriage (Duval & Miller, 1985). Individual character is shaped by factors existing before marriage and is challenging to be modified. In contrast to the factors that exist in the post-marriage period, individuals can aim to improve existing factors such as marital adjustment. Marital adjustment includes four components: adjustment to the partner, sexual, financial, and to the spouse's family (Hurlock, 2003). The couple's success in adjusting to marriage and their ability to deal with household problems influence perceived marital satisfaction (Hurlock, 2003).

Marital adjustment is a holistic and longtime process. The marital adjustment process can be thoroughly investigated from time to time (Scorsolini-Comin & dos Santos, 2012), not only between husband and wife but also with the couple's family, so that the couple feels positive support from their extended family (Abbas, 2019). The early period of marriage is a process for in-laws and daughters-in-law to adjust to each other after what was originally two foreign parties who were then united in a marital relationship (Saputra et al., 2014). Given various demands, particularly marital adjustments, the first five years of marriage are a critical initial period determining a marriage's success (Duval & Miller, 1985).

In addition to marital adjustment, religiosity is considered to influence marital satisfaction. Several previous studies have found a link between religiosity and marital satisfaction (Istiqomah & Mukhlis, 2015; Khairiyah & Aulia, 2017). According to Olson et al. (2011), one of marriage's strengths is spiritual well-being, which includes religious beliefs that assist couples in dealing with various life issues. People with a high level of religiosity have a higher level of marital satisfaction (Hurlock, 2003).

Religious commitment and practice are two components of religiosity that can lead to marital satisfaction (Aman et al., 2019). In married life, religiosity influence individual thought patterns and behavior (Mokoginta, 2014) and effectively help address problems and painful experiences so that individuals can achieve marital satisfaction (Dowlatabadi et al., 2016). Even though people have difficulty making marital adjustments, religiosity plays a role in the formation of marital satisfaction (Marni, 2018).

As matrilineal married culture exists in Pamekasan Regency, this study aimed to discover the effect of marital adjustment and religiosity on the marital satisfaction of families living with parents-in-law. Specifically, this study aimed to determine the extent to which adjustment and religiosity influence marital satisfaction among Muslim families who live in their parents-in-laws' houses in Pamekasan Regency.

Method

Research Design

This research is a quantitative study to explore the effect of marital adjustment and religiosity on marital satisfaction. The data was collected online through a google form from June to July 2021. The participants fill out the demographic data first to ensure they fit the subject criteria, then fill out the questionnaire for about 15-20 minutes.

Participants

The characteristics of this study's participants were a husband or wife who lives in their parents-in-laws' house, the first marriage with the length of marriage fewer than five years, Muslim, lives in the Pamekasan Regency and were willing to participate indicated by filling out the consent form. A non-probability sampling with accidental sampling was applied to select participants. Ninety participants were involved in this study. [Table 1](#) shows the demographic data of participants.

Table 1
Demographic Data

Characteristic	Type	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	40	44.4
	Female	50	55.6
Educational Level	Elementary School	1	1.1
	Senior High School	21	23.3
	College	68	75.6
Age of marriage	< 1 year	29	32.2
	1-2 years	23	25.6
	2-3 years	10	11.1
	3-4 years	13	14.4
	4-5 years	15	16.7
Age at the time of marriage	19-21 years	15	16.7
	22-24 years	25	27.8
	25-27 years	37	41.1
	28-30 years	11	12.2
	31-33 years	2	2.2

All participants are Muslim; the majority are female (55.6%) and have a university education (75.6%). In terms of marriage length, mostly less than a year (32.2%), while the age at marriage is 25-27 years.

Instruments

The marital satisfaction scale, adapted from [Iffah \(2018\)](#), developed based on ten aspects of marital satisfaction ([Fowers & Olson, 1993](#)), was used to measure marital satisfaction. The scale consists of fifteen items, with five ideal distortion items. The instrument is a Likert scale with four answer options: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree. The item discrimination index is between .536 and .796 with reliability $\alpha=.939$.

Meanwhile, the marital adjustment scale was used to measure marital adjustment, developed based on four aspects of marital adjustment ([Hurlock, 2003](#)). The instrument is a

Likert scale with four answer options: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree. The scale consists of 22 items, with an item discrimination index ranging from .371 to .706 and reliability $\alpha=.892$.

The religiosity scale was developed to measure religiosity based on five dimensions of religiosity (Stark & Glock, 1970). The instrument is a Likert scale with four answer options: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree. The scale consists of 24 items with an item discrimination index ranging from .375 to .771 and a reliability of $\alpha=.867$.

Data Analysis

The research data was analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 20 for Windows program. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to analyze the data. According to Muhid (2019), multiple linear regression can measure the influence of more than one independent variable on one dependent variable; in this study, marital adjustment and religiosity with marital satisfaction.

Results

Table 2 depicts the effect of marital adjustment and religiosity on marital satisfaction ($F=35.889$; $p=.000$). This result indicates marital adjustment and religiosity have a significant effect on marital satisfaction. The contribution of marital adjustment and religiosity to marital satisfaction is based on the coefficient of determination ($R^2=.452$). This result means that marital adjustment and religiosity account for 45.2% of marital satisfaction.

Table 2

Multiple Linear Regression Test Result

<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
.672	.452	35.889	.000

Table 3 shows the results of the partial effect of the marital adjustment on marital satisfaction ($t=6.224$; $p=.000$) and the partial effect of religiosity on marital satisfaction ($t=2.163$; $p=.033$). These findings suggest that increasing marital adjustment scores leads to increased marital satisfaction. Moreover, the higher religiosity, the higher the marital satisfaction will be, and vice versa. Table 3 shows that partially, marital adjustment and religiosity had a 36.33% and 8.84% effective contribution to marital satisfaction, respectively.

Table 3

The Contribution of Marital Adjustment and Religiosity on Marital Satisfaction

Variable	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Effective contribution (%)
(Constant)	13.933	2.489	.015	
Marital adjustment	.352	6.224	.000	36.33
Religiosity	.161	2.163	.033	8.84

Table 4 shows the categorization of participants' on marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, and religiosity. Most participants had a moderate level of marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, and religiosity, 65.6%, 73.3%, and 57.8%, respectively.

Table 4
The Categorization of Marital Satisfaction, Marital Adjustment, and Religiosity

Variable	Category	Total	Percentage
Marital satisfaction	High	17	18.9
	Moderate	59	65.6
	Low	14	15.6
Marital adjustment	High	13	14.4
	Moderate	66	73.3
	Low	11	12.2
Religiosity	High	22	24.4
	Moderate	52	57.8
	Low	16	17.8

Discussion

The findings of this study show that marital adjustment and religiosity contribute significantly to marital satisfaction. The simultaneous contribution of marital adjustment and religiosity to marital satisfaction is medium. Marital adjustment and religiosity contribute to 45.2% of marital satisfaction.

Partially, both marital adjustment and religiosity contribute positively to marital satisfaction. The contribution of marital adjustment to marital satisfaction is higher than that of religiosity. The positive effect of the marital adjustment on marital satisfaction is consistent with the previous study of wives in long-distance marriages, which identified disparities in marital satisfaction based on the wife's level of marital adjustment (Rachmawati & Mastuti, 2013). Research participants with a high level of marital adjustment also had a high level of marital satisfaction. Another study among couples on early and late marriage shows a positive correlation between marital adjustment and life satisfaction (Arshad et al., 2014). The higher the marital adjustment, the higher their marital satisfaction will be. This result is consistent with the findings that marital satisfaction is linked to individual adjustment (Rospita & Lestari, 2016). The differences in individual abilities in marital adjustment influence perceived marital satisfaction (Marni, 2018). Every interaction between individuals and their partners can produce dynamics in the marriage domain, allowing couples to attain life happiness and marital satisfaction (Scorsolini-Comin & dos Santos, 2012). Couples need to adapt in their marriage to obtain marital happiness and satisfaction (Hurlock, 2003).

Various issues that may arise during the marital adjustment process can impact marital satisfaction (Marni, 2018), particularly for those who live with in-laws. Couples adjust with their spouse and their spouse's families to gain positive support and establish good relationships (Abbas, 2019). The son-in-law's adjustments will be more challenging because he must focus on his relationship with his in-laws as a member of his partner's family (Hurlock, 2003). The problems in the early years of marriage in connection with the in-laws determine the marriage's success. Parents-in-law can interfere in their children's and daughter-in-law's married lives, thus can make the daughter-in-law uncomfortable and influencing marital adjustment and satisfaction.

Another finding in this study is that religiosity and marital satisfaction have a positive effect. This result is consistent with the findings that religiosity was positively connected with marital satisfaction and had a 33.9% effective contribution (Istiqomah & Mukhlis, 2015). Furthermore, a study on couples from Iran's education department found a relationship between religious opinions with marital satisfaction (Dowlatabadi et al., 2016). A similar finding was also found among couples undergoing the *Ta'aruf* process, in which religiosity contributes to 71% of marital satisfaction (Khairiyah & Aulia, 2017). In a family, religiosity helps to overcome obstacles and trials, form good relationships, prevent deviations from

established boundaries, and ensure marital satisfaction between couples (Dowlatabadi et al., 2016). Religiosity reinforces people to be more tolerant and live a life based on Sharia (Istiqomah & Mukhlis, 2015). As a result, individual religiosity in married life can positively impact marital satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the findings of a previous study when marital adjustment was relatively low, and religiosity could play a role in increasing perceived marital satisfaction (Marni, 2018). Good religious knowledge makes individuals aware of every consequence of each behavior, making them more satisfied with their marriage (Mokoginta, 2014).

Furthermore, religious beliefs are the source of control for couples, allowing them to continue carrying out their respective duties and roles, be patient, trust each other, and cultivate love based on Allah (Marni, 2018). Moreover, similarities in religious and emotional tendencies lead to emotional harmony in the couples' lives (Fard et al., 2013). In addition, a realm of cognition, e.g., cognitive consensus and religious beliefs, also plays a role in determining marital satisfaction (Fard et al., 2013). As the Muslims regard marriage as sacred worship in which the couple makes a sacred promise to God, religiously committed couples can have a better relationship in their marriage (Aman et al., 2019).

Both male and female participants have moderate levels of marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, and religiosity. Married couples living together in the parents-in-laws' house are still natural for Indonesian people, particularly in Pamekasan Regency, with local matrilineal cultural characteristics (Surya, 2013). This finding is consistent with a previous study that showed no difference in the average level of marital satisfaction between husband and wife (Kurdek, 2005).

Regarding the length of the marriage, most participants had moderate levels of marital adjustment, religiosity, and marital satisfaction. This finding demonstrates that the first five years of marriage are the most critical time for people to make changes to build family harmony. The moderate level indicates that individuals are still in psychological maturation (Muhid et al., 2019). Various adjustments are required in the first years of marriage, frequently affecting perceived marital satisfaction (Hurlock, 2003). However, marital satisfaction tends to decrease as the length of the marriage is longer (Mokoginta, 2014).

In terms of the age at marriage, all age groups of participants at marriage were in their early adulthood. In this study, no differences in marital adjustment, religiosity, or marital satisfaction across all age groups of participants at marriage. People adjust to new life patterns in their early adulthood, including when they marry (Hurlock, 2003).

This study has limitations. First is the adoption marital satisfaction scale from the standard ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale. Second, a measuring instrument is required primarily based on local community culture and the characteristics of the research participants, families, and living with parents-in-law. Further research will get more accurate research results when using specific measuring instruments. Furthermore, this study is based solely on the two factors studied for marital satisfaction. Therefore, other factors need to be explored as long as they are relevant to the criteria of couples' participants.

Conclusion

Marital adjustment and religiosity significantly contribute to marital satisfaction in families living with parents-in-law. Marital adjustment positively affects marital satisfaction, which means that when marital adjustment improves, so does the individual's perception of marital satisfaction. Similarly, religiosity positively affects marital satisfaction; the higher religiosity, the higher marital satisfaction will be. As the contribution of marital adjustment to marital satisfaction is higher than that of religiosity, families living with parents-in-law need to enhance their marital adjustment to have higher marital satisfaction.

Acknowledgment

The authors acknowledge the Rector of Islamic State University Sunan Ampel Surabaya, and the Dean of the Faculty of Psychology and Health for the support and also to the participants in the data collection stage.

Declarations

Author contribution. AN conceived the presented idea, developed the theory, and analyzed the data. SKK designed the framework theory. Both authors discuss the results and contribute to the final manuscript.

Funding statement. There is no funding agency involved in this research.

Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information. No additional information is available for this paper.

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