

PERCEIVED MARITAL SATISFACTION AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AMONG MARRIED PARTNERS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the current study was to examine the association between perceived marital satisfaction and depressive symptoms among same-sex and different-sex married couples in the United States. This secondary data analysis examined cross-sectional data collected from the Health and Relationships Project, United States, 2014-2015 (ICPSR; Umberson, 2015). The sample for the current study includes only individuals between the ages of 35-65 years old who were legally married (N= 838). Data collection utilized snowball sampling and Chi-square tests were conducted in this study. Overall, the findings revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between perceived marital satisfaction and depressive symptoms. Higher levels of perceived marital satisfaction in marriages were associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms. Both the same-sex and different-sex respondents had similar associations; there was an association between perceived marital satisfaction and depressive symptoms regardless of gender.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of Study

- The pandemic intensified the conditions that fuel intimate partner violence (IPV). IPV cases increased by 25-33 percent globally in 2020 (Boserup et al., 2020). It exacerbated these issues within partners, creating a higher risk for marital dissatisfaction and worst emotional satisfaction (Wagner et al., 2020).
- A spouse with depressive symptoms may have a difficult time in expressing self to spouse, may report decreased marital satisfaction and be less capable of being there emotionally for spouse (Behler et al., 2019).

Purpose of the Research: To examine the impact of perceived marital satisfaction on depressive symptoms in both same-sex and different-sex married partners.

Research Question: What is the relationship between depressive symptoms and perceived marital satisfaction among married couples 35-65 years of age?

Hypothesis: It is hypothesized that among married couples, a positive perception of marital satisfaction is associated with lower levels of depression among partners 35-65 years of age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marital support was an overarching theme in research stating that support buffered some stressors and would assist in mediating marital satisfaction (Rusu et al., 2015; Falconier, & Kuhn 2019; Hilpert et al., 2018).

- Previous research shows that partner's depressive symptoms were associated with a decline in marital quality and in turn was directly linked partner's responds to perceived relationship (Helms et al., 2014).

Research Gaps

- While several studies have shown links between depressive symptoms and marital stressors, few have studied whether the perception of marital satisfaction influences depressive symptoms.
- Research studies also looked into gender differences in association between marital distress and marital quality, but studies focused only to include heterosexual couple (Carr et al, 2016; Garcia, & Umberson, 2019).

METHODS

Research Design

- The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from the Health and Relationships Project, United States, 2014-2015. It used a cross-sectional, quantitative study consisting of one baseline measure.
- The data included heterosexual and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer, [LGBTQ+] legally married couples aging between 35 and 65 years old during the survey collection.
- Recruitment was done in two ways: recruitment of randomly selected partners utilizing the Massachusetts Registry of Vital public records and the use of snowball sampling.
- The current study utilized self-reported data from the questionnaires.

Sample

- The sample in the study included a total of 838 individuals and consists of 106 gay couples, 157 lesbian couples, and 115 heterosexual couples.
- Participants ages varied from 35 to 65 years of age, were legally married for at least 3 years at the time of survey administration (2014-2015) and were living together (cohabitating and married) for an average of 15 years (ranging from 3.5 to 45 years).
- The current study utilized the entire original sample of participants and look into relationship of depressive thought and perceived marital satisfaction (ICPSR; Umberson, 2015).

Measures

Variables examined within the current study are individual's depressive feelings within the past week, perceived marital satisfaction and demographic variables. The current study utilized the nominal type participant responses in constructing variables.

- Independent Variable: Perceived Marital Satisfaction-** The current study only the question that was taken from the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) was that asking respondent "Past Week: I felt depressed." The responses were the following "1" Rarely/None of the time, "2" Some of the Time, "3" Occasionally or "4" Most of the Time.
- Dependent Variable: Depressive Thought-** The current study only the question that was taken from the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) was that asking respondent "Past Week: I felt depressed." The responses were the following "1" Rarely/None of the time, "2" Some of the Time, "3" Occasionally or "4" Most of the Time.

Sample Characteristics (N = 838)

Characteristics	f	%
Gender		
Male	372	44.4
Female	466	55.6
Ethnicity		
White	724	86.4
Black or African American	28	3.3
Hispanic	36	4.3
Asian	23	2.7
Native American	1	0.1
Mixed	16	1.9
All other races	10	1.2
Relationship Type		
Gay	248	29.6
Lesbian	342	40.8
Straight	248	29.6
Scale	Mean (SD)	
Age	(8.4) 48.6	
Total Years Married	(6.7) 8.6	

RESULTS

Chi-square Analysis

- A chi-square test was calculated comparing the frequency of felt depression within the past week among married partners based on perceived marital satisfaction.
- A significant association was found ($\chi^2(15) = 137.8, p = 0.001$), while a Cramer's V statistic suggested a moderate relationship (0.23).
- Participants were significantly more likely to have felt "Completely" satisfied in their relationship (70%) and not indicate any felt depression in the past week. Only 10% of the participants who indicated "not at all" feeling satisfied with their relationship, felt depressed the highest. Based on this sample, participants in general seemed equally likely to feel the highest levels of marital satisfaction, while not reported levels of felt depression within the last week.



Descriptive Statistics: Study Variables (N = 838)

Characteristics	f	%
How satisfied are you with your relationship?		
Not at All	10	1.2
A little	13	1.6
Somewhat	40	4.8
Mostly	149	17.8
Almost Completely	336	40.1
Completely	290	34.6
Past Week: I felt depressed		
Rarely/None of the Time	485	57.9
Some of the Time	238	28.4
Occasionally	89	10.6
Most of the Time	26	3.1



Prevalence of Felt Depression within the past week among married partners based on their perception of marital satisfaction (N=838)

How Satisfied are you with your Relationship?	Past Week: I felt Depressed % (f)			
	Rarely/None of Time	Some of the Time	Occasionally	Most of the Time
Not At All	10 (1)	10 (1)	40 (4)	40 (4)
A little	38.5 (5)	23.1 (3)	30.8 (4)	7.7 (1)
Somewhat	32.5 (13)	30 (12)	25 (10)	12.5 (5)
Mostly	38.3 (57)	39.6 (59)	16.8(25)	5.4 (8)
Almost Completely	61.3 (206)	29.5 (99)	7.4 (25)	1.8 (6)
Completely	70 (203)	22.1 (64)	7.2 (21)	0.7 (2)

$p < .05$.

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

- Consistent with the findings from previous research, the current study's results provide evidence that there is an association between levels of marital satisfaction and reported levels of felt depressive symptoms.
- The results of the Chi-Square analysis demonstrate these findings were significant for both same-sex and different-sex participants.
- Results indicate that both same-sex and different-sex couples in general seemed equally likely to feel the highest levels of marital satisfaction and had reported lower levels of depressive symptoms.
- Moreover, the findings highlight that regardless of gender affiliation both same-sex and different-sex marriages are affected by perception of marital satisfaction and depressives' symptoms.

Strengths and Limitations

- One strength that the current study had was it took into account both same-sex and different-sex partners and asked them similar questions interdependently. In addition, since the survey questions were done in a quantitative manner this allowed for more inferential statistical analysis.
- A limitation in the study was the lack of diversity and demographic covariates in the study that did not reflect the general population in question.
- Another limitation, the impact of potential bias related to the self-reported response of participants. Due to the potential fear of their significant other's reaction to answered questions related to marital satisfaction, respondents to the survey may have felt uncomfortable disclosing, thus not accurately representing themselves in the sample.
- An important limitation of this study is the ambiguity of the term marital satisfaction. This can be a socially constructed term and makes it harder to conceptualize it to the same definition for all to base their answers on.

Implications for Practice & Policy

- The findings of this study highlight the need for increased awareness on how marital dissatisfaction may influence depressive symptoms to the individual in a relationship.
- This study provides implications for future research and development of programs. An increase in research-based knowledge of intervention strategies are needed. Such as the increased need to provide psychoeducation about the importance of healthy relationships in order to mitigate depressive symptoms.
- To provide increased mental health marital therapy options for those who identify as the LGBTQI+ community as to lower any stigmatization of seeking treatment.

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