

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Faith Community Spouses' Religious Orientation and Their Marital Satisfaction

Packiaraj Arumugham

Associate Professor of Social Work, Midwestern State University, Texas, USA

Abstract:

This study examined the relationship between religious orientation and marital satisfaction among spouses of a faith community in India. The study participants (N=100) were chosen non-randomly. Data was collected from the participants by administering the religious orientation scale developed by Allport and Ross (1967) and the dyadic adjustment scale developed by Spanier (1976). The study has revealed a mild positive relationship between participants' intrinsic religious orientation and their marital satisfaction and also years of their membership in evangelical union and intrinsic religious orientation. The study has also revealed a mild negative relationship between participants' extrinsic religious orientation and marital satisfaction. Implications of the findings and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: *Extrinsic religious orientation, intrinsic religious orientation, marital satisfaction*

1. Introduction

Why do some marriages last and some do not? What does religion have to do with marriage? Researchers have investigated these questions to find out the relationship between religion and marriage. Based on an extensive review of literature, Waite and Lehrer (2003) argue that religion and marriage are important social institutions, which serve as integrative and regulative social forces. They further assert, "Marriage and religion influence various dimensions of life, including physical health, mental health and happiness, economic well-being, and the raising of children" (p. 256). Other researchers have also reported a positive relationship between religion and marriage (Call & Heaton, 1997; Duncan, Wilkerson, & England, 2006).

Sullivan (2001) notes that "much of the research for the last more than five decades is predicated on the idea that couples who are more religious are more likely than other couples to have happy and stable marriages" (p. 2). Mahoney and Cano (2014) state, "... religion may offer people spiritual resources that facilitate marital functioning" (p. 584). The view that couples who are religious have happy and stable marriages may stem from religious teachings pertaining to marriage.

Goodman and Dollahite (2006) assert, "The reality is that many religious couples are committed to their marriage in large part because they believe that God desires them to be so" (p. 142). Larson and Goltz argue "if a couple's religion emphasizes the importance of marriage, spouses may feel greater commitment to the marriage" (as cited in Call & Heaton, 1997, p. 383). Major world religions like Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, to mention a few, have teachings on marriage. It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss all of them.

Spurred on by the view that marriage is good for individuals and the society and that marriage is positively influenced by religion, the author wanted to explore if this view had any empirical support in the faith community that he had been a part of. Hence, the present study was carried out in the author's home town in India among spouses who identified themselves as Christians and as members of a faith community called evangelical union. Thus, Christianity's teachings on marriage will be briefly described here. The Bible says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Gen 2: 18 New King James Version). There are other specific references to marriage in the Bible (e.g., Mat 19: 6, Eph 5: 25-30), all of which uphold the institution of marriage. In his discussion of the institution of marriage according to Christianity, Stott (2000) affirms, "Although in all societies marriage is a recognized and regulated human institution, it's not a human invention. Christian teaching on this topic begins with the joyful affirmation that marriage is God's idea and not man's" (p. 258). Taking this view further, Zacharias (2004) asserts, "The home was instituted before the Church was brought into being...God intended the home to be the seed from which culture flowers and history unfolds" (p. 17).

India, with its myriads of religions, including Christianity, places significance on not only religious values, but also family relationships and permanence in marriage (Thukral Mahajan, Pimple, Palsetia, Dave, & De Sousa, 2013). In the Indian context, permanence in marriage may happen as a result of marital satisfaction and may also happen as a result of societal pressure. Regardless of the reason for permanence in marriage, Indian culture places a lot of value on religion, marriage, and family relationships. Despite such importance given to religion and marriage, research on the impact of religion in marital satisfaction in India is very limited (e.g., Kallampally, Oakes, Lyons, Greer, & Gillespie, 2008) and there is no research on the impact of Christianity on marital satisfaction among evangelical Christians in India. It is outside of the scope of this paper to discuss the impact of religious orientation of all faith communities on their marital satisfaction but only Christian faith

community called evangelical union. As the study participants, self-identified as Christians and as followers of Christianity's teachings on marriage, the author decided to investigate their religious orientation and marital satisfaction.

For the purpose of this research, the author adopted Allport and Ross' (1967) definition of religious orientation given below: [E]xtrinsic religious orientation [is] a flagrantly utilitarian motivation underlying religious behaviors... The individual endorses religious beliefs and... engages in religious acts only to the extent that they might aid... feeling comforted and protected... In contrast, intrinsic religious orientation refers to motivation arising from goals set forth by the religious tradition itself, and is thus assumed to have an "otherly," ... even self-denying quality. (p.144)

To put simply, for a person with extrinsic religious orientation, religion is peripheral; whereas, for a person with intrinsic religious orientation, religion is central.

The author also adopted Spanier's (2007) definition of marital satisfaction as follows: "... general measure of satisfaction in an intimate relationship" (p. 99). Yedirir and Hamarta (2015) indicate a similar view: "... [Marital satisfaction is] a concept that seeks to represent the happiness perceived by individuals concerning their marital relationship" (p. 1550).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The study participants, who were chosen by means of convenience sampling, consisted of married couples (N = 100) from the city of Tiruchirappalli in the state of Tamilnadu, India. As stated earlier, the participants belonged to the faith community called evangelical union of which the author was also a member. The criteria used for selection were as follows: the participants must have been married for more than a year; they should also be members of evangelical union for more than a year.

2.2. Measures

A self-prepared questionnaire was used to collect participants' socio demographic data such as, gender, age, length of marriage, age at the time of marriage, whether marriage was an arranged marriage or a romantic marriage, religious background, employment, and whether participants attended the annual family conference organized by evangelical union.

Religious Orientation Scale of Allport and Ross (1967) was administered to collect data pertaining to participants' religious orientation. The instrument consisted of two subscales, namely, Extrinsic and Intrinsic with a total of 21 items. While the Extrinsic subscale consisted of 12 items, the Intrinsic subscale consisted of 9 items. Each item in the instrument is a statement to which participants respond using a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The reliability of the scale was demonstrated by Allport and Ross (1967) with item-to-scale correlations. While the Cronbach's alpha for the intrinsic subscale was in the mid .80s, for the extrinsic subscale it was in the low .70s.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale of Spanier (1976) consisting of 32 items was administered to find out participants' adjustment with their spouse. The instrument has four subscales as follows: dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression. The scores of the instrument can range from 0 to 151. The scale and subscales are highly reliable; Cronbach's alpha = .96 for the entire scale and ranges from .73 to .94 for the subscales. The validity of the scale is supported by the consensus of the judges on the relevance of the scale's content.

2.3. Data Collection and Data Analysis

A research assistant helped with data collection. Before collecting data, the research assistant obtained participants' consent and also assured them that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained. Data was collected from all the study participants (N=100). Using SPSS 17, the author analyzed the data. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, such as, mean, range, and standard deviation and also included inferential statistics, such as, "t" tests, ANOVA, and correlation.

2.4. Findings

Slightly more than half of the participants (52%) were males and 48% were females. Consistent with common practices in India, an overwhelming majority (92%) reported their marriage was an arranged marriage (marriage arranged by parents and/or significant others with or without the consent of the marrying parties) and only 8% reported their marriage was a romantic marriage. A large majority (90%) reported they were Christians from birth, whereas 10% of them were converts to Christianity from Hinduism. With regard to employment, majority (76%) reported that they were employed in government or private organizations, while 14 percent were homemakers, and 10 percent were missionaries.

Participants' age ranged from 25 to 65 years (M = 40.88 years); their age at the time of marriage ranged from 18 to 38 years (M = 26.51 years, SD = 3.46). Every year, evangelical union organizes a seven-day state level family conference. The speakers with expertise on various topics such as marital adjustment, resolving marital conflicts, financial management, parenting, to mention a few, give lectures followed by discussion among the attendees. When asked whether they attended the family conference, majority (78%) of the participants responded in the affirmative. To the question on the degree of marital happiness, except for one participant, for all the others, the response ranged from "happy" to "perfectly happy."

Besides the afore-mentioned findings of descriptive statistics, data analysis also included inferential statistics, and the findings are presented in the following tables:

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	t value
Gender			
Male	30.73	10.37	1.058
Female	28.58	9.88	
Type of marriage			
Arranged	30.52	10.07	*4.888
Romantic	20.25	5.15	
Religious background			
Christian	29.26	10.26	-1.319
Hindu convert	33.70	8.46	
Whether attended family conference?			
Yes	28.68	9.54	-1.722
No	33.32	11.58	

Table 1: "t" Test on Selected Demographic Variables and Extrinsic Religious Orientation
N=100; df=98; *p<.05

There was no statistically significant difference between participants' gender, religious background, their attendance at the family conference and their extrinsic religious orientation. However, there was a statistically significant difference between those whose marriage was an arranged marriage and those whose marriage was a romantic marriage with regard to their extrinsic religious orientation. The mean score of the participants whose marriage was an arranged marriage was 30.52 and the mean score of those whose marriage was a romantic marriage was 20.25. The difference between the means is statistically significant ($t= 4.888$, $p < .05$). In the Indian culture, marriage is not considered to be between just two individuals but between two families. Hence, in an arranged marriage, the involvement of two families in keeping marriage intact is greater than in romantic marriages.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	t value
Gender			
Male	36.98	5.37	-.467
Female	37.48	5.28	
Type of marriage			
Arranged	37.32	5.33	.607
Love	36.13	5.19	
Religious background			
Christian	37.20	5.47	-.113
Hindu convert	37.40	3.66	
Whether attended family conference?			
Yes	38.08	4.98	*3.032
No	34.18	5.41	

Table 2: "t" Test on Selected Demographic Characteristics and Intrinsic Religious Orientation.
N=100; df=98; *p<.05

There was no statistically significant difference between participants' gender, type of marriage, religious background, and their intrinsic religious orientation. However, there was a statistically significant difference between those who attended the family conference and those that didn't. The mean score of the participants who had attended the family conference was 38.08 and the mean score of those who hadn't attended the conference was 34.18. The difference between the means is statistically significant ($t= 3.032$, $p < .05$). Family conference focuses upon helping the attendees to keep God as the center of their life, including their marriage. The topics presented in the conference are centered on the scriptural principles for life, including marriage.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	t value
Gender			
Male	123.58	12.14	1.098
Female	120.69	14.15	
Type of marriage			
Arranged	122.09	12.94	-.264
Love	123.38	16.39	

Religious background	122.38	13.29	.426
Christian	120.50	12.39	
Hindu convert			
Whether attended family conference?	121.01	13.36	-1.701
Yes	126.36	11.72	
No			

Table 3: "t" Test on Selected Demographic Characteristics and Dyadic Adjustment
N=100; df=98; p>.05

As may be seen in Table 3, the difference between the means was not statistically significant on the selected demographics (gender, type of marriage, religious background and attendance at family conference), with regard to dyadic adjustment.

Source of Variation	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F
Occupation Vs. Extrinsic Religious Orientation				1.106
Between Groups	4	453.394	113.348	
Within Groups	95	9739.606	102.522	
Occupation Vs. Intrinsic Religious Orientation				2.511*
Between Groups	4	266.513	66.628	
Within Groups	95	2520.647	26.533	
Occupation Vs. Dyadic Adjustment				0.898
Between Groups	4	624.533	156.133	
Within Groups	95	16510.857	173.798	

Table 4: ANOVA Results for Selected Variables
*p <.05

The test results of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) show that there was no statistically significant difference between participants' occupation and their extrinsic religious orientation and also dyadic adjustment. But, there was a statistically significant difference between participants' occupation and their intrinsic religious orientation (F= 2.511; p < .05; df 4, 95), although there was only a mild difference (Eta-squared= .0956).

Variables	Correlation value
Age	-.023
Duration of marriage	-.058
Age at marriage	.137
Years of membership in evangelical union	-.009
Extrinsic Religious Orientation	-.272 **
Intrinsic Religious Orientation	.221*

Table 5: Correlation between Religious Orientation and Dyadic Adjustment
** p<.01; *p<.05

As may be noted in Table 7, there is no significant correlation between selected demographics and dyadic adjustment but there is a mild negative correlation between extrinsic religious orientation and dyadic adjustment, and a mild positive correlation between intrinsic religious orientation and dyadic adjustment.

Variables	Correlation value
Age	-.023
Duration of marriage	-.058
Age at marriage	.137
Years of membership in evangelical union	-.009
Extrinsic Religious Orientation	-.272 **
Intrinsic Religious Orientation	.221*

Table 6: Correlation between Years of Membership and Intrinsic Religious Orientation
** p<.01; *p<.05

The above table shows that there is a mild negative correlation between years of membership in evangelical union and extrinsic religious orientation and a mild positive correlation between years of membership in evangelical union and intrinsic religious orientation. It may be concluded that the longer the association of the participants with evangelical union, the more their intrinsic religious orientation.

2.5. Limitations

The study lacks generalizability as the sample size was small and the study participants were drawn from one location, despite the fact that the members of evangelical union are located in different parts of India. Another limitation was that there was a very little variation in marital happiness, with 99% of the participants reporting "happy" to "perfectly happy."

2.6. Implications and Directions for Future Research

The study has revealed a mild positive relationship between intrinsic religious orientation and marital satisfaction. Research shows that there is a positive relationship between intrinsic religious orientation and marital satisfaction (Ahmadi & Hossein-abadi, 2008; Dudley & Kosinski, 1990). Social workers working in faith-based organizations, might find it helpful to keep in mind the intrinsic religious values of their clients when dealing with the marital issues of evangelical Christians (Gordon et al, 2008). If permitted by the faith-based organizations, social workers may encourage clients who are married, to read the Scripture and to pray together as couples so their intrinsic religious values are strengthened.

The study has also revealed a mild positive relationship between participants' years of membership in evangelical union and their intrinsic religious orientation. This corresponds with the views of Ghorpade, Lackritz, and Singh, (2006) as follows: "...Evangelical Christians...were more likely to be intrinsically religious" (p. 51). Social workers working in faith-based organizations, if permitted, may encourage their clients who are married, to be part of a faith community so their intrinsic religious values are strengthened which may result in enhancing marital satisfaction. The study has also revealed a mild negative relationship between extrinsic religious orientation and marital satisfaction.

As the sample size of the study was small, large scale studies amongst evangelical Christians have to be undertaken for generalizability and for drawing stronger conclusion than this study's conclusion. Future research should also focus on comparing the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation on marital satisfaction among people of different religions. Therefore, this study is only a beginning attempt in examining the relationship between religious orientation and marital satisfaction among evangelical Christians.

3. References

- i. Ahmadi, K., & Hossein-abadi, F.H. (2009). Religiosity, Marital Satisfaction and Child Rearing. *Pastoral Psychology*, 57: 211-221.
- ii. Call, V.R.A., & Heaton, T.B. (1997). Religious Influence on Marital Stability.
- iii. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36 (3): 382-392. Retrieved May 16, 2008 from Ebscohost.
- iv. Dudley, M. G., & Kosinski Jr., F. A. (1990). RELIGIOUSITY AND MARITAL SATISFACTION: A RESEARCH NOTE. *Review of Religious Research*, 32(1), 78.
- v. Duncan, G. J., Wilkerson, B., & England, P. (2006). CLEANING UP THEIR ACT: THE EFFECTS OF MARRIAGE AND COHABITATION ON LICIT AND ILLICIT DRUG USE. *Demography*, 43(4), 691-710
- vi. Ghorpade, J., Lackritz, J.R., & Singh, G. (2006). Intrinsic Religious Orientation Among Minorities in the United States: A Research Note. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 16(1), 51-62.
- vii. Gordon, K.C., Frousakis, N.N., Dixon, L.J., Willett, J.M., Christman, J.A., Furr, R.E et al. (2008). *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 311-319.
- viii. Kallampally, G. A., Oakes, K. E., Lyons, H. Z., Greer, J. M., & Gillespie, C. K. (2008). Gender, Psychological Resilience, Acculturation and Spirituality as Predictors of Asian Indian American Marital Satisfaction. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 10(1), 35-52. doi:10.1300/J515v10n01_04
- ix. Mahoney, A., & Cano, A. (2014). Introduction to the special section on religion and spirituality in family life: Delving into relational spirituality for couples. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 28(5), 583-586. doi:10.1037/fam0000030
- x. Stott, J. (2000). *Issues Facing Christians Today*. (11th ed.). Mumbai, India: GLS Publishing.
- xi. Sullivan, K.T. (2001). Understanding the Relationship Between Religiosity and Marriage: An Investigation of the Immediate and Longitudinal Effects of Religiosity on Newlywed Couples. *Journal of Family Psychology*, Vol. 15 Issue 4, p610-626. Retrieved May 16, 2008 from Ebscohost.
- xii. Thukral Mahajan, P., Pimple, P., Palsetia, D., Dave, N., & De Sousa, A. (2013). Indian religious concepts on sexuality and marriage. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, S256-S262. doi:10.4103/0019-5545.105547
- xiii. Yedirir, S., & Hamarta, E. (2015). Emotional Expression and Spousal Support as Predictors of Marital Satisfaction: The Case of Turkey. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 15(6), 1549-1558. doi:10.12738/estp.2015.6.2822
- xiv. Waite, L. (2005). Marriage, family and health. *Family Matters*, (70), 54-55.
- xv. Waite, L. J., & Lehrer, E. L. (2003). The Benefits from Marriage and Religion in the United States: A Comparative Analysis. *Population & Development Review*, 29(2), 255-275.
- xvi. Zacharias, R. (2004). *I, Isaac, take Thee, Rebekah*. Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing Group, a Division of Thomas Nelson, Inc.