

The relationship between spiritual health and psychological well-being with emotional divorce

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Abstract

Background

Divorce is a family crisis leading to various side effects. Emotional divorce could be regarded a preliminary stage before formal divorce thus its timely diagnosis could help rebuilding and repairing the marital relationship and prevent divorce. Psychological well-being and spiritual health are expected to reduce the rate of emotional divorce. This study aimed to investigate how emotional divorce is related to spiritual health and psychological well-being.

Methods

Participants were 384 divorced spouses admitted in health centers of Qom, Iran who completed the Spiritual health questionnaire for the Iranian population, Ryff psychological well-being scale, and Gottman's emotional divorce questionnaires. The data were analyzed using SPSS 22 and the correlations of the variables were calculated by Spearman Correlation and multiple regression with the statistical significance of $p < 0.05$.

Results

The findings indicated an inverse relationship between the spiritual health and psychological well-being of the participants with their emotional divorce. The results showed no significant relationship with gender, education, and marital duration.

Conclusion

It seems that interventions to improve spirituality and psychological well-being could decrease emotional divorce among couples. This is achievable through the cooperation of multiple organizations including educational institutions, social media, and religious bodies.

Introduction

The quality of relations among family members has a significant role in shaping their attitudes and behaviors within family and society (Krok, 2018). This is most important in couples' relations that determines the health of family which in turn, is responsible for the health or harm of society (Jiménez-Picón, 2021). Divorce as a family crisis could also be responsible for social side effects. But the official statistics of divorce do not fully reflect the failure rate of spouses in marital life. Along with that, there is a larger number of couples going on with emotional divorces, with no apparent separation or demand for legal divorce (Harvey, 2016; Vangelisti, 2009). This form of living leads to undesired consequences including decreased psychological well-being and thus, decreased attempt to promote the realization of

the person's talents and abilities (Hashemi, 2017). Emotional divorce could be related to different factors from external determinants including social, political, and economic factors (Nayebi, 2021) to individual factors including mental, psychological, and demographic variables (Al-Moselhy, 2023). Emotional divorce could be regarded a preliminary stage before formal divorce. In this way, it seems that its timely diagnosis could help rebuilding and repairing the marital relationship and prevent divorce.

Psychological well-being could protect human beings against health threats and maintain or regain their well-being (CD., 2013). Psychological well-being according to Ryff, consists of six factors including self-acceptance ((being aware of and accept one's strength and weaknesses), positive relations (having deep, meaningful relationships with others), autonomy (being self-determined and taking independent decisions), purposefulness (establishing and being guide by goals), personal growth (experiencing progress as a result of developing one's strengths), and environmental mastery (managing one's circumstances to take advantage of opportunities). These factors have been used as the basis for a multidimensional instrument for assessing psychological well-being (Ana Blasco-Belled, 2022).

Spiritual health on the other hand is a dimension of holistic health that apart from its variations depending on cultural and religious factors, is widely accepted and addressed in different communities. Spiritual health deals with meaning of life, transcendence, connectedness with others and the ultimate power. It is a central component of humanity and protective in terms of health and overall well-being (V., 2021). In other words, spiritual health focuses on communication with God, oneself, society and the environment. Some believe spiritual health to be more than a dimension of health, but an overarching construct unifying and integrating other sides of holistic health and well-being including physical, psychological, social and emotional (Fisher et al., 2000). It seems that the purposefulness of life and right relationships with the Creator, the universe, and others may lead to the development of human existence and consequently, distress tolerance and life satisfaction. In this way, psychological well-being and spiritual health are expected to reduce the rate of emotional divorce. The present study aims to investigate the probable relationships of spiritual health and psychological well-being with emotional divorce.

Materials and Methods

Design and setting

This was a cross-sectional study with the participation of 384 divorced men and women. The participants entered the study through available sampling out of the couples admitted in health centers of Qom, a city in central region of Iran. Those with the inclusion criteria including a minimum of 2 years of marital life before divorce and age over 20 years were invited to fill up the questionnaires and were enrolled with their consent. They received necessary information about the research aims and the way they could participate.

Data collection

In order to measure the data of the present research, three questionnaires were used.

Spiritual Health Questionnaire

Spiritual health questionnaire for the Iranian population is a valid and reliable spiritual health assessment instrument which includes 48 questions in terms of three conceptual structures of insight, tendency and behavior; and three subjective concepts of relationship with God, relationship with oneself, and relationship with the periphery. Designing and compiling this questionnaire was first done by Amiri et al. Also its validity and reliability have been confirmed in the same study (Amiri et al., 2015).

Psychological Well-Being Questionnaire

The Short version (18 items) of the Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale was designed in 1989 and revised in 2002 (Keyes et al., 2002). This version consists of 6 factors (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance). The total score of the six factors was calculated as the score of psychological well-being, higher scores indicating better psychological well-being. The reliability of the Ryff psychological well-being questionnaire was reported by Dierendonck with the Cronbach's alpha of 0.77 to 0.90 (Van Dierendonck & differences, 2004). The validity of the Persian version of this questionnaire has also been reported (Bayani et al., 2008).

Gottman's Divorce Questionnaire: The emotional divorce questionnaire is taken from John Gottman's book: "Why marriages succeed or fail". The questionnaire was written in 2008 with statements on various aspects of life that the person might agree or disagree with. This scale has 24 yes/ no questions. Higher response scores mean the greater likelihood of an emotional divorce (Gottman et al., 1995). The validity and reliability of this test has been approved in the Iranian population (Mousavi & Rahiminezhad, 2015).

Data Analysis

The data were entered into SPSS-20 software and analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed that the data were not normally distributed ($p > 0.05$), so the Spearman Correlation Coefficient was used for analysis. Multiple regressions were used to examine the effect of independent variables (psychological well-being and spiritual health) on dependent variables (emotional divorce). The statistical significance was set at $P\text{-value} < 0.05$.

Results

Among participants, 249 persons (64.8%) were female, and 135 (35.2%) male. Other demographic characteristics including education, marital duration and employment status of the participants are shown in the Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive demographic statistics

Variables	Frequency	
	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	249	64.8
Female	135	35.2
Education		
Lower than Diploma	98	25.5
Diploma	190	49.5
Associate Degree	12	3.1
Bachelor	69	18
MSc and Doctorate	15	3.9
Marital duration		
< 5 years	184	47.9
6–10 years	102	26.6
11–15 years	42	10.9
> 15 years	56	14.6
Employment		
Housewife	210	54.7
Employed	165	43.0
Student	9	2.3

The mean scores of the three variables were revealed as shown in Table 2. The kolmogorov Smirnov test showed that the data did not have normal distribution (sig < 0.05).

Table 2
descriptive statistics of research variables

Variable	Mean	Kolmogorov Smirnov coefficient	level of significance
Psychological well-being	2.0931	1.433	0.033
Spiritual health	2.1191	3.759	0.000
Emotional divorce	5.0625	3.976	0.000

The results showed an inverse correlation between psychological well-being and emotional divorce ($p < 0.0001$, $r = -0.451$). This relation was shown in both men and women with varying marital duration and different levels of education ($p < 0.0001$). Also, there was an inverse correlation between spiritual health and emotional divorce ($p < 0.0001$, $r = -0.381$). This was true with different demographic variables except in men ($p > 0.0001$) (Table 3).

Table 3
Correlation of the variables of the study

Variable	Psychological well-being	Spiritual health	Emotional divorce
Psychological well-being	1		
Spiritual health	-0.317**	1	
Emotional divorce	-0.451**	-0.381**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To investigate the effect of psychological well-being and spiritual health on emotional divorce, multiple regressions analysis was used. Accordingly, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.215. So, at least one of the predictors (independent variables) is associated with emotional divorce. Considering that meaningfulness of psychological well-being and spiritual health are less than 0.05, these two scales have a linear relationship with the emotional divorce (Table 4).

Table 4
Regression coefficients among variables

Model	No standard values		standard values	t	P-value
	β	SD	Beta		
Constant	24,236	2,117		11,449	< 0.001*
psychological well-being	-0,68	0,008	-0.404	-8,200	< 0.001*
spiritual health	-0,23	0,010	-0,120	-2,431	< 0.001*

***Significant**

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate whether spiritual health and psychological well-being are related to emotional divorce and could predict these variables. The results indicated that both spiritual health and psychological well-being had inverse relationship with emotional divorce. This implies that couples with higher psychological well-being and higher spiritual health scores are less likely to experience emotional divorce. Spiritual health is regarded as a family protective factor (Gardner et al., 2008) that exerts its effects through improved religious coping competencies (Varner, 2009). In this way, the integrated spiritual-religious resilient perspective acts as a predictor of family strength (Ghaffari et al., 2013). This highlights the outstanding role of addressing religion and spirituality by counselors and facilitators involved in the process of family support (Griffith & Rotter, 1999; Ingersoll, 1994; Kelly Jr, 1997) and reminds the essential need of paying attention to spirituality in different aspects of life. On the other hand, the association between marriage and psychological well-being has been well reported in the literature (Kim & McKenry, 2002; Mastekaasa, 1992; Williams, 2003) showing that psychological well-being is inversely related to divorce (Elmimanesh & Zhaleh, 2018). Other studies indicate the marital expectations as a predictor of increased emotional divorce and self-efficacy as a predictor of decrease in emotional divorce (Rasheed A, 2021). Though there was few evidence on the relationship between psychological wellbeing and emotional divorce, but studies have confirmed the role of religious attitude along with marital satisfaction on emotional divorce (Shakeri S, 2023). The increasing trend of divorce in the recent decades is partly rooted in the cultural paradigms of the family. Thus, trying to preserve the religious outlook and the traditional values can be a helpful in preventing emotional divorce (Parvin S, 2011). Since emotional divorce in addition to its undesirable consequences can be a prelude to formal divorce, it is required to take the appropriate actions to prevent it and it seems that attention to psychological well-being and improving spiritual health could be effective measures in this respect.

A major limitation of the study was that the participants were divorced spouses with different backgrounds, while it seems that a study on divorced couples might lead to more reliable results.

Conclusion

As the results indicate, to decrease emotional divorce among couples, interventions are required to improve spiritual health and psychological well-being. This is achievable through the cooperation of multiple organizations including educational institutions, social media, and religious bodies.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Researchers adhered to the ethical guidelines throughout the study. The study was performed in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations. Informed consent that was obtained from all of the participants, explaining the aims of the study assuring about the confidentiality of their information. Ethical considerations were observed in other stages including data analysis and report of the findings.

The research was approved by the Medical Ethics Committee at Qom University of Medical Sciences (IR.MUQ.REC.1396.31).

Consent for publication

The participants have agreed for their anonymized data/information to be published.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Clinical trial number

Not applicable

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Author Contribution

SY, HS and MA contributed in designing the study, SY, HS, MH and MA collected and analyzed the data. The final report and article were written by SY, HS. All authors read and approved by all the authors.

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Data availability

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this article.

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