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Research Paper

The Effects of the Dimensions of Psychological Capital on Family Cohesion and Adaptability of Married Students



Mahtab Pouratashi ^{1*} 

1. Associate Professor, Department of comparative studies in higher education, Institute for research & planning in higher education, Tehran, Iran.

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examined the effects of the dimensions of psychological capital on family cohesion and adaptability.

Methods: A quantitative research approach was applied. The statistical population was a couple of students at Universities in Tehran, and a sample of 384 students was selected for the study by using a random sampling method. A questionnaire was conducted for data collection, that after confirming the reliability (according to viewpoints of some faculty members in the field) and validity of the scales (Cronbach's alpha coefficient); it gave to the sample group. In the next step, descriptive and inferential statistics were done using SPSS software.

Results: The findings showed that among the dimensions of psychological capital, the mean score of self-efficacy was higher than the other dimensions. Differences and similarities were found in students' psychological capital by gender. The results of the correlation coefficients showed that there were significant correlations between the dimensions of psychological capital with family cohesion and adaptability of the respondents. Regression analyses indicated that self-efficacy had the most effect on family cohesion, and resilience had the most effect on family adaptability of couple students.

Conclusion: According to the findings, it can be concluded that psychological capital affects family cohesion and adaptability. The findings have implications for premarital counseling and couple therapy.

1. Introduction

Marriage is one of the key institutions affecting individuals' life and well-being (Stutzer & Frey, 2006). Marital satisfaction, as one of the common concepts that affect the quality of relationships and communications between couples (Ali & Saleem, 2022), is used for assessing happiness and stability in a marriage (Tavakol et al., 2017). Positive association between marital satisfaction and family function has been identified in previous studies, that satisfied and happy couples were

more likely to function well in different aspects of family (Pedro et al., 2015), and couples' relationship quality affected their mental health (Javdan et al., 2023). Also, in stable marriages, couples are happier, healthier, and live longer (Whisman et al., 2018). According to family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 1997), the family operates as a whole, which cannot be captured by the simple sum of individuals' characteristics (Shigeto et al., 2012). So, family cohesion and adaptability play a

*Corresponding Author:

Mahtab Pouratashi

Address: Department of comparative studies in higher education, Institute for research & planning in higher education, Tehran, Iran.

E-mail: m.pouratashi@irphe.ir



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key role in family function and satisfaction. According to Olson's circumplex model, the family is considered as a whole, where the degree of functionality depends fundamentally on its cohesion and adaptability (Olson, 2000). In other words, couples' cohesion and flexibility throughout life are essential and a predictor of their marital satisfaction (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2021).

Family cohesion as an indicator of family health (Fosco & Lydon-Staley, 2020) is marked by strong emotional bonds and feelings of closeness, kindness, support, and affection (Olson et al., 2019). Family cohesiveness represents the sense of togetherness and closeness in a family, and it has been identified as one of the most central dimensions of family functioning (Bloom, 1985). This variable has four levels, including disengaged, separated, connected, and enmeshed. The two central levels (separated and connected) are assumed to be the balanced levels of family cohesion, and the two extreme levels (disengaged and enmeshed) are assumed to be the unbalanced levels of family cohesion (Joh et al., 2013). Healthy families have a balance between weak and extreme closeness in family cohesion (Ghahvehchi-Hosseini et al., 2021; Piercy et al., 1996). In a cohesive family, each member receives more support and help from others, strengthening the family foundation (Mokhtari et al., 2023). Family adaptability is defined as changes in the roles of control and family discipline (Olson, 2000). Accordingly, there are four levels of family adaptability, including rigid, structured, flexible, and chaotic. The two central levels (structured and flexible) are assumed to be the balanced levels of family adaptability, and the two extreme levels (rigid and chaotic) are assumed to be the unbalanced levels of family adaptability (Joh et al., 2013). In an adaptable family, leadership is democratic, and youngsters participate in decision-making. Also, familial roles are not dependent on gender or age (Ahern et al., 2008).

The above-mentioned issue refers to the necessity of identifying factors influencing family cohesion and adaptability, and marital satisfaction. One of the factors that can have a significant correlation with the mentioned variables is psychological capital. Psychological capital is one of the key capitals in people's lives and success. This capital, which was introduced by Luthans, is rooted in positive psychology. It is defined as a complement of personal and organizational features which can be developed and directed (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). Psychological capital contained measurable and effectively controllable applications related to the potential and psychological capacity of individuals (Cavus & Gokcen, 2015). According to Luthans et al. (2007), as the current environment becomes hypercompetitive, human and social capitals become insufficient to maintain long-term competitive advantages, and people need the

development of psychological capital, a construct consisting of four dimensions: self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. Self-efficacy refers to having confidence to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks (Luthans et al., 2007). Hope means an energy focused on personal goals and a way or alternative ways that direct people to the goals (Snyder et al., 1991). Optimism refers to making a positive attribution about succeeding now and in the future. Cavus and Gokcen (2015) stated that optimism could be defined as a generalized expectation to have a better future. Resilience refers to sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond to attain success when beset by problems and adversity (Luthans et al., 2007, p. 3). Psychological resiliency is the coping skills of people in case of uncertainty, barriers, and negative situations (Luthans et al., 2006). According to research literature, couples with a low level of psychological capital stick to their hard strategies in the time of dealing with differences and conflicts (Zamanizad et al., 2018). In contrast, couples with high psychological capital make an effort to reach their common goals. They deal optimistically and patiently with challenges and obstacles that are placed on their goals (Tehrani Azad & Mojtabae, 2019).

Previous studies revealed that there was a significant correlation between psychological capital with conflict resolution styles (Zamanizad et al., 2018), couples' marital intimacy (Akbari et al., 2019), and marital satisfaction (Nosrati Mehr & Bostan, 2019). Also, the findings of a study showed that personality and flexibility were related to marital satisfaction (Shareh & Eshaghi Sani, 2019). Naserhshariati (2022), in a study on the effectiveness of image relationship therapy on cohesion-family flexibility and happiness of couples with emotional divorce, found that communication imaging training could be used as an intervention to increase the flexibility and happiness of couples seeking divorce. Mokhtari et al. (2023) in a study found that attitude towards love, marital intimacy, and differentiation had a direct impact on the family cohesion of married women. Azadsarv and Sepehrianzar (2021) in a study found that there was a significant difference in comparison between the family cohesion of women with and without chronic pain, in which the family cohesion of women with chronic pain was lower than women without chronic pain. Silvia Fernandes et al. (2020) in their study on adaptability and cohesion of families found that 14.6% had a disengaged family cohesion, 7.4% had a very rigid dimension in family adaptability, and about the type of family, and 6.1% had an unbalanced dimension. Haji Abbasi and Taher (2022) in their research found that there was a significant relationship between action flexibility and marital adjustment. There was also a significant correlation between the components of extraversion,

agreeableness, and openness to experience with marital adjustment.

Students, as the future pillars of societies, need to be at peace while studying. So, any type of mental conflict, especially issues related to marriage, can have negative effects and consequences on their physical, mental, and emotional health and their educational status. Therefore, it is vital that family cohesion and adaptability of couple students be deeply investigated, and the factors that affect these two variables also be identified. Accordingly, considering the fact that a study that has comprehensively examined the relationships of the mentioned variables (including psychological capital, family cohesion, and adaptability) was not found, the present study seeks to investigate the effect of the dimensions of psychological capital on family cohesion and adaptability of married students. The objectives were to examine: (a) the psychological capital level of married students; (b) the relationship between psychological capital and family cohesion and adaptability of married students; (c) the effect of psychological capital on family cohesion and adaptability of married students.

2. Materials and Methods

This applied research was a non-experimental and cross-sectional survey and used a quantitative research method. In this research, the ethical standards were observed. The statistical population of the study consisted of a couple students at Universities in Tehran, of which 384 students were selected for the study by using a random sampling method. Inclusion criteria in the study were being an undergraduate or graduate student, studying at a public university in Tehran, and both husband and wife being

students. Exclusion criteria were remarriage of one of the spouses and failure to complete the questionnaire.

Data were gathered from the sample group by means of a questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire contained demographic characteristics of respondents, and the other parts of the questionnaire were scales of (a) psychological capital and (b) family cohesion and adaptability.

(a) Family cohesion and adaptability evaluation scale (FACES-III): The scale is a 20-item tool developed by Olson, measuring two major dimensions, namely, cohesion (10 items) and adaptability (10 items). It asks the respondents to score how frequently the described behavior occurred in his/her family on a Likert scale (almost always = 5 and rarely = 1), and the total score of the scale is obtained by the sum of the scores of all the questions. The scale does not present inverse items; therefore, a higher score in each dimension indicates a higher level of cohesion or adaptability, as the case may be.

(b) Psychological capital scale: The scale was developed by [Luthans et al. \(2007\)](#), was used. This scale includes 24 items that include four dimensions of (1) resilience, (2) hope, (3) self-efficacy, and (4) optimism. The respondents were asked to score each item from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Face validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by a panel of experts consisting of some faculty members and experts in the field of psychology and counseling. Reliability of the scales was tested and approved by applying Cronbach's alpha coefficient, according to the criterion proposed by [George & Mallery \(2019\)](#) (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of reliability and normality tests

Scale	Dimension	Cronbach's alpha	Kolmogorov-Smirnov
psychological capital	Self-efficacy	0.91	0.095 ^{ns}
	Optimism	0.87	0.125 ^{ns}
	Hope	0.91	0.112 ^{ns}
	Resilience	0.86	0.062 ^{ns}
Family cohesion and adaptability	Cohesion	0.87	0.094 ^{ns}
	Adaptability	0.91	0.101 ^{ns}

After confirming the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, it was given to the sample group. In the next step, descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted, using SPSS/Windows version 23. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied to test the null hypothesis that a set of data comes from a normal distribution. Because the variables had a significance value greater than 0.05, the variables had data that were normally distributed (Table 1). So, parametric tests were used for inferential statistics.

3. Results

The distributional pattern of demographic data of the

sampled population is shown in Table 2.

As stated, the psychological capital of married students was examined in four dimensions, and the maximum score for each dimension could have been 36 (Table 3). According to the minimum and maximum scores, all dimensions of psychological capital were at the desired level. Also, the mean score of self-efficacy was higher than the other dimensions. The results of the comparative test by gender (Table 3) showed that males had significantly higher scores on self-efficacy and resilience than their female counterparts. Females had significantly higher score on hope compared to the males.

Table 2. Demographic data of respondents

Variable	Frequency	(%)
Gender		
Male	147	38.3
Female	237	61.7
Age		
20>	28	7.3
21-23	131	34.1
24-26	161	41.9
26<	64	16.7
Educational level		
Bachelor	163	42.4
Master	221	57.6
Years of marriage		
<1	56	14.6
2	108	28.1
3	117	30.4
4	77	20.1
>5	26	6.8

Table 3. Results of descriptive and comparative tests

Dimension	Mean	Gender	Mean	t-value	Sig.
Self-Efficacy	29.47	Male	30.27	3.144	0.002
		Female	28.97		
Hope	23.17	Male	22.36	-2.547	0.017
		Female	23.67		
Resilience	25.95	Male	26.32	2.231	0.023
		Female	25.72		
Optimism	23.05	Male	22.98	-0.268	0.789
		Female	23.09		

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the probable relationships between psychological capital with family cohesion and adaptability. As can be seen (Table 4), the relationships between family cohesion with

psychological capital (except optimism) were significant. Also, there were significant relationships between the dimensions of psychological capital (except hope) with family adaptability.

Table 4. Results of (a) correlation analysis and (b) regression analysis

Variable		Family cohesion		Family adaptability	
		r	Sig.	r	Sig.
Self-Efficacy	(a) Correlation analysis	0.301	0.000	0.127	0.014
		0.117	0.022	0.082	0.110
		0.113	0.028	0.135	0.008
		0.068	0.185	0.103	0.044
Hope	(b) Regression analysis	Standardized coefficients (Beta)		Standardized coefficients (Beta)	
		0.417		0.217	
		0.321		-	
		0.178		0.382	
Resilience		-		-	
		-		-	
		-		-	
		-		-	
Optimism		-		-	
		-		-	
		-		-	
		-		-	

In order to explain variation in the family cohesion and adaptability (dependent variables) by psychological capital (independent variables), multiple regression analysis was conducted (Table 4). According to the results of standardized coefficients, among the dimensions of psychological capital, self-efficacy ($\beta=0.417$) had the most effect on family cohesion. Also, resilience ($\beta=0.382$) had the most effect on family adaptability.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the effects of the dimensions of

psychological capital on family cohesion and adaptability. As proposed by [Nazir et al. \(2012\)](#), a cohesive family is characterized by a supportive and understanding atmosphere of family members. Each member tends to understand and help to solve the needs and concerns of family members. Also, according to [Namani & Dehmardeh \(2020\)](#), high family cohesion leads to members experiencing life situations and differences as solvable rather than threatening challenges; so they are more prepared to properly identify and overcome problems.

The findings of the first objective of this study showed that a couple of students had a favorable level of psychological capital, so that they scored higher than mean in all the dimensions (self-efficacy, hope, resilience, optimism) of psychological capital. Similarities and differences were found in respondents' psychological capital by gender. However, there was no significant difference between male and female students in optimism. [Hasannia et al. \(2016\)](#) in their study found that male and female students had significantly different self-efficacy scores.

For the second objective of this study, the results of the correlation analysis showed that there were significant correlations between the dimensions of psychological capital with family cohesion and adaptability of the respondents. However, the relationship between family cohesion with optimism and the relationship between family adaptability with hope were not significant. Based on the findings, it can be said that psychological capital causes people to gain more self-awareness and, as a result, to make more efforts to achieve goals with more perseverance and resilience. So, having psychological capital helps spouses to have a better confrontation in situations of difference and also, they are able to strengthen family functioning in order to achieve the best results that benefit both spouses and the family. As a consequence, psychological capital can be considered as a guarantee for a better life and the continuation of a happy life together. It can cause a better link between spouses and increase spouses' relationship and marital quality and satisfaction ([Asadpour et al., 2025](#); [Mikaeili et al., 2025](#)).

The findings of the third objective of this study regarding the effect of psychological capital on family cohesion and adaptability of married students showed that self-efficacy had the most effect on family cohesion and resilience had the most effect on family adaptability of married students. To explain the finding, it can be said that self-efficacy, which is one's understanding and judgment about his/her abilities, helps a person to succeed in social adaptation. As a result, couples with more self-efficacy try to use their emotional information in a positive and more effective way to strengthen family cohesion. In addition, resilience is demonstrated by positive adaptation in situations of risk or adversity ([Masten & Reed, 2002](#)). [Luthans and Youssef \(2004\)](#) illustrated that resilient individuals can change for the better through complexity. So, couples need to improve their resilience skills.

This study confirmed the importance of psychological capital on family cohesion and adaptability. Therefore, it is recommended that universities increase active and

effective participation of students in intra-university and extra-university activities; so that self-efficacy, hope and resilience of students are increase and their level of concern and disappointment be decrease. It is recommended that university counseling centers evaluate the psychological capital levels of male and female students who are about to get married by conducting personality and psychological tests, so that they can access useful guidance and results. Finally, it is recommended that counseling centers of the universities inform and educate students on the methods to strengthen each dimension of psychological capital by publishing and distributing booklets and brochures to students.

5. Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

In this research, the ethical standards including the guarantee of confidentiality and privacy, were observed, and the respondents were assured that the information would remain private and this has been fully observed.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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