



# The Concept and Aspects of a Successful Marriage as Stated by Successful Iranian Couples and Experts: A Qualitative Study

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** Successful marriage and the strengthening family foundation bring about numerous positive outcomes for both the family and society. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the concept and dimensions of successful marriage from the perspective of successful couples and experts in this field.

**Materials and Methods:** This qualitative study was done by the conventional content analysis method through the participation of 10 Iranian couples (10 men and 10 women) and 14 experts in related courses to marriage. The research environment was health centers. The couples entered our study after obtaining at least %70 of the score from the ENRICH questionnaire. The sampling was done purposefully and the data were collected using unstructured in-depth interviews and continued until achieving saturation. In the meantime, data analysis was conducted using a conventional content analysis method.

**Results:** The obtained main concepts from the data were four main themes and ten main categories. The main theme included recognizing and understanding the needs, life skills, personality liberation, along with development and flourishing

**Conclusions:** For a successful marriage, the couple's premarital knowledge of each other and their spouse's family, knowing necessary life skills, as well as recognizing and understanding married life are necessary. Moreover, the couples will acquire the necessary development and flourish to manage married life through achieving positive behavioral qualities including personality liberation. To achieve success in married life, one cannot ignore the role of training in acquiring life skills both before and after the married life.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Couples, Qualitative Research

## Introduction

Marriage is an important and natural process in human life that has existed in all cultures and periods in different forms. It has attempted to bridge two ideas with different values and ideologies (1) and to construct human relations (2). In addition, marriage aims to fulfill a variety of basic human needs such as generation survival and upbringing the children, fulfilling the dream of being parents, achieving the highest level of friendship and intimacy, labor division, cooperation, assisting one another in married life (3), having a safe place for peace and flourishing skills, as well as achieving human perfection and elevation and mental health (4).

Accordingly, most humans expect to achieve happiness through marrying someone and forming a married life (5). However, events are always observed during marriage, including the low rate of occurrence or the rising age of marriage, the lack of understanding between couples

and the development of the phenomenon of divorce, and changes in the attitudes of people in mate selection (6,7).

The increased divorce trend in the primary years of married life, especially among the youth, indicates the marriage candidates' lack of insights for various matters including spouse selection. On the other hand, the changes created for spouse selection pattern among the Iranian young people (i.e., from traditional to modern) have been effective for unsuccessful marriage. Because young couples have not paid attention to the indicators of successful marriage, including marital satisfaction, continued satisfaction, compatibility, and commitment in modern spouse selection patterns (8). Regarding discussing the reasons of unsuccessful marriages and divorce, the researchers have mentioned factors such as unexpressed emotional needs, close relatives' intervention, cultural conflicts, and some personal and mental factors such as addiction, financial problems, and betrayal (9).

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Thus, attempting to understand effective factors on successful marriage and the strengthened family foundation is considered as the most important issue in these conditions. Accordingly, the couple's premarital knowledge, preparation for married life, and the presence of appropriate criteria for selecting a spouse are mentioned in this regard (10).

Given the destructive effects of divorce on family health, its negative consequences on the mental-social life of young people and the whole society, the changes of marital values at different periods of time (11), and the importance of coping with cultural changes (8), the present study was designed to demonstrate the concepts and aspects of a successful marriage according to the viewpoints of successful Iranian couples and experts.

### Materials and Methods

The present qualitative study as a conventional content analysis was conducted from September 2015 to February 2016. Ten Iranian couples residing in Tehran and 14 specialists in marriage-related fields (e.g., psychologist, psychiatrist, lawyer, sociologist, sexologist, family counselor, and cleric from different parts of Iran) participated in the present study. The research environment was the health centers of the Shahid Beheshti, Tehran and Iran Universities of Medical Sciences.

Sampling was performed purposefully. In addition, the inclusion criteria were having Iranian nationality and a married life of at least 5 years, knowing at least how to read and write, suffering from no recognized mental disease, acknowledging the success of marital life, earning 70% of the score from the ENRICH marital satisfaction questionnaire (with 47 question), and showing a willingness to participate in the study. The participants were selected with the utmost variety with respect to marriage age, married life term, along with the number of children and the couple's jobs in order to increase the validity of the data.

Further, the inclusion criteria for experts in marriage-related subjects were having Iranian nationality and residing in Iran and willing to participate in the study and the exclusion criteria for both groups were not willing to continue to the interviews.

After describing the aims of the study, acquiring the consent letter, and preserving the research moral considerations with respect to data confidentiality and the participants' freedom to discontinue the research, the participants completed the shortened version of ENRICH marital satisfaction before the interview (47 questions).

In the study conducted by Solaimanian (13), ENRICH marital satisfaction questionnaire with 115 questions was translated into Persian for its validation. Then, the psychologist presented the questions and confirmed the content validity of the questionnaire. In the next step, it was administered on a group of 11 people and its coefficient of validity through Cronbach's alpha was 0.93.

It was decided to take a short form due to a large number of questions in this scale. For this purpose, the correlation of each question with the whole questionnaire was calculated, followed by selecting 47 questions with a high correlation. The selection was done equally from different instrument scales. The coefficient of the validity related to the form of 47 questions using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for 11 people, which was 0.95. Olson et al calculated the validity of this questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha and reached 0.92 (12, 13).

The couples acquiring 70% of the score (164.5 scores from 235 total scores) in the ENRICH Evaluation and nurturing relationship issues, communication, and happiness) marital satisfaction questionnaire entered the present study and the researcher arranged the time and place of the interview. Total interviews were performed by the researcher in the participants' homes.

Unstructured in-depth interviews, observation, and field notes were used for data collection. Interviews with the husband and wife were done separately by the researcher. During the interview, the researcher paid attention to the non-verbal behaviors of the participants as well. In addition, all interviews continued until reaching saturation so that no new code was obtained in the interview with the ninth couple. However, the interview with the tenth couple was done to guarantee certainty. The interview started with the question "Do you feel happy with your married life?" and questions like "What factors have made you a successful couple" were asked based on the answers. The time of the interviews ranged from 25 to 120 minutes all of them were done once. However, in cases of ambiguity, the researcher communicated with the participants via email, telephone, and in person. The interview texts were typed in Word 2010 and then reviewed several times to obtain a deep and proper understanding of their contents.

Data analysis was finally conducted using a conventional content analysis method by applying MAXQDA 10. First, the codes were extracted based on the meaning units obtained from the participants' descriptions. The codes were then classified based on the similarities and differences, followed by determining the themes.

In this study, Gaba and Lincoln's criteria (i.e., validity and acceptability, portability and appropriateness, reliability and reliability, along with reliability and stability) were used to check rigor and trustworthiness of data (14). Further, the applied methods included variety in research participants, continuous involvement with the research topic, data recording and analysis right after the interview and the interviewers' feedbacks for the next interview, and data reviewing by two couples and members of the research team. Furthermore, an external observer helped with the research team in order to increase consistency, and the code-recode method was applied for analyzing the data. The obtained data were confirmed and corrected after revisions by external observers. Moreover, the data were given to two couples who did not participate in the

study in order to evaluate its transferability. All the steps of the research were explained in detail so that preceding the research procedure would be feasible for the others. Finally, data analysis was performed using a conventional content analysis based on the proposed steps of the Graneheim and Lundman (15).

## Results

According to findings, the average age of the men and women was  $42.50 \pm 8.51$  and  $40.20 \pm 7.67$ , respectively. Additionally, the average marriage ages were  $28.59 \pm 2.90$  for men and  $26.25 \pm 3.89$  for women. Finally, the average marriage length of men and women was  $13.95 \pm 7.73$  and  $13.95 \pm 7.73$ , respectively. All participants resided in Tehran and had the maximum variety in terms of education level, job, Iranian ethnicity, as well as the number and gender of children. Eventually, four themes and ten main categories were extracted after the conventional content analysis (Table 1).

### 1. Recognizing and Understanding the Needs

This theme included two main categories of premarital knowledge and married life needs. Regarding premarital knowledge, the participants believed in knowing the families of their spouses. In other words, they thought that they should know the families with respect to equal social status and nobility. In addition to knowing the families, the participants emphasized knowing each other with respect to the suitability of personal characteristics, desires, hobbies, and beliefs. Moreover, the participants maintained that marriage candidates must acquire the necessary information and skills for starting a successful life from their family, society, and counseling centers.

#### 1.1. Premarital Knowledge

With regard to knowing the original family subcategory concerning having equal social status, a 42-year-old man indicated that *"This is really important for the families to be of the same economic class"*. A 45-year-old woman also said, *"Our families were alike with respect to religious issues, economic matters, and even the social class"*. With regard to knowing the nobility of the families, a twenty-nine-year-old woman declared that *"The family is really important."*

**Table 1.** Themes and Main Categories Extracted From the Interview With Participants

Theme	Main Category
Recognizing and understanding the needs	-Premarital knowledge -Married life needs
Life skills	- Love skills - Communication skills - Problem-solving skills - Family members' management
Personality liberation	- Positive character stability - Preserving human ethics
Development and flourish	- Social maturity - Spiritual power

*This really matters whether the family is noble or not"*.

As regards the personal knowledge subcategory, the suitability of personal characteristics was observed based on the results. Concerning age suitability, a 43-year-old man stated that *"I think that the age gap of the couple should be appropriate"*. As for physical appearance, a twenty-nine-year-old woman indicated that *"When husband and wife do not match up with respect to physical appearance, this makes one party suspicious of the other and pick on him/her. As for the appropriateness of the educational level of the couple, a 45-year-old woman mentioned that "I had better live with someone who had the same educational level as me"*. Respecting the similarity of educational fields, a 35-year-old man asserted that *"In addition to the educational level, it is better that husband and wife major in the same field"*.

With respect to having similar desires and expectations, a 50-year-old man stated that *"We have more or less the same desires and expectations"*. Regarding similar hobbies, a 45-year-old man maintained that *"Husband and wife should have the same hobbies"*. With respect to holding approximately similar ideas, a 37-year-old woman claimed that *"To me, people had better marry later in life. The older you get, the more experienced you will be"*. A 50-year-old man also expressed that *"I think one had better get married when he/she is 25-28 years old"*.

Concerning acquiring knowledge, a 34-year-old woman referred to the importance of premarital counseling and indicated that *"It is better for young people to have premarital counseling"*. In this case, one of the psychologists participating in the study declared that *"The guidance of parents and counselor is considered essential for the formation of life"*.

#### 1.2. Married Life Needs

This main category included the subcategory of recognizing needs such as cooperating with the spouse, putting spouse before children, and fulfilling their logical needs. With respect to cooperating with the spouse, a 43-year-old man mentioned that *"Now, the house is neat and clean. If my wife goes to her hometown, I will keep the house clean as well. I am rather obsessed with home affairs. I mean, I like to keep everything in its right place"*. A 33-year-old woman stated that *"Now that I have been pregnant for 36 weeks, my husband does not let me even replace a glass. He does help me with the housework"*. As regards putting wife before children, a 50-year-old man indicated that *"The only fault you can find with women is that they care more about their kids than husbands after childbirth"*.

Concerning the fulfillment of logical needs, a 33-year-old woman stated that *"He has best fulfilled my desires in my life, either materially or spiritually. However, I have attempted to do so as well"*.

### 2. Life Skills

This theme contained four main categories including love

skills, as well as communicational and problem-solving skills and family members' management.

### 2.1. Love Skills

With regard to emotional intimacy, the participants stressed expressing interest and love to their spouse, having a close relation, and loving one another. A 54-year-old woman believed that *"Marital intimacy can put right many issues"*. Regarding marital intimacy, a twenty-nine-year-old woman maintained that *"This very love and interest that we express to each other is of the utmost importance"*. With respect to expressing love and intimacy to the spouse, a 50-year-old man claimed that *"Man's failure to express love to his wife can be referred to as one of the reasons behind divorce"*. In this regard, one of the lawyers indicated that *"A husband or wife should be able to express his love and affection to his/her spouse"*.

The importance of mutual sexual satisfaction and understanding of sexual matters has been stressed in the sexual satisfaction subcategory. Concerning the importance of mutual sexual satisfaction, a 35-year-old woman declared that *"How can I put it? Sexual matters do matter. Thank goodness, we are both OK there"*. As regards the lack of mutual understanding on sexual matters, a 45-year-old woman mentioned that *"The lack of understanding in many cases such as sexual matters is one of the factors of the lack of success"* and clergymen about the importance of sexual satisfaction expressed that *"It is observed that more than 80% of divorces are due to sexual dissatisfaction"*.

### 2.2. Communicational Skills

The principles of skills imply mutual respect, adaptation, and compatibility which are the most important factors stressed by the participants. Most of the participants maintained that having these skills are necessary to establish a successful life. Concerning mutual understanding, a twenty-nine-year-old woman stated that *"I do care that he understands me. I should add that this understanding is mutual"*. With respect to adaptation and compatibility, a 49-year-old woman expressed that *"I have not waited for my husband's family to understand me; instead, I have tried to adapt myself with the etiquette of my husband's family"*. A 39-year-old woman described the mutual respect of her married life as *"He respects me exactly the way he did when he first proposed marriage. Fortunately, I respect him the way I did when we first met"*.

As regards the main subcategory of communicational skills, a 48-year-old man explained the skill of 'saying NO' as such, *"One of my criteria for choosing the right wife was her ability to say 'No' at different points of her life; it is really hard to do this though"*. With respect to 'active listening skill', a 38-year-old woman declared that *"My husband does listen to what I say and I care about his listening to me"*. Concerning eloquent speaking skills, a 54-year-old woman stated that *"As long as you can say sweet things to*

*your husband, there is no need to argue over anything"*. Regarding expressing desires, a 40-year-old indicated that *"It is necessary at times to remind your husband of things you would like to have"*. Regarding cooperation, a 54-year-old-woman mentioned that *"Instead of opposing, husband and wife should have better interaction"*.

### 2.3. Problem-Solving Skill

The main category of problem-solving skills included two main subcategories as problem-solving capabilities, along with setting and preserving boundaries between themselves and their families.

With regard to taking life easy, a 32-year-old man stated that *"There are some problems and issues in life that happen automatically and you don't need to be strict"*. With respect to taking initiative for making peace, a 45-year-old woman described that *"One of my husband's good habits is that he initiates to make peace in less than an hour when we argue over something"*. Concerning negotiating skills in life, a 37-year-old woman declared that *"My husband is not quarrelsome. He is not for arguing either. If there is something wrong, we talk about it"*. As for solving problems with the relatives of the spouse, a 50-year-old man mentioned that *"If my wife finds faults with my family and reminds me of them, there is something wrong. Men and women must do their part in solving the problems"*. In this regard, one of the participating psychiatrists in the study explained that *"It is a successful marriage in which the husband and wife have learned to solve their problems through dialogue"*.

Regarding not picking on one's spouse, a 45-year-old woman expressed that *"I don't know what it is called in psychology and counseling, my husband does not pick on me. He picks on nothing"*. With respect to using others' experiences, a 58-year-old man stated that *"To me, there are times in your life when you need to use people's experiences to better your life regardless of your educational level"*. Concerning mutual understanding of financial issues, a 35-year-old man maintained that *"Despite being financially independent, my wife has never bought anything without letting me know about it. I have never rejected her request either"*. As for mutual understanding in life, a 58-year-old man claimed that *"Having a mutual understanding in life is the most fundamental provision for success"*. Eventually, with regard to self-control in specific conditions, a 54-year-old woman indicated that *"Boys and girls need to test one another when they lose their temper; it is then that they show their real self"*.

According to participants about setting and preserving boundaries both between husband and wife and their families, families did better to play an external observer and recommend a solution to the couple when there is a disagreement between husband and wife instead of interfering with their family issues. In this regard, a 34-year-old man mentioned that *"We set and preserved the boundaries from the very beginning. In other words, we did*

*not let our families interfere with our family problems*".

Moreover, with respect to not discussing family matters with families, a twenty-nine-year-old woman maintained that *"Even if we have a big problem in our life, I avoid discussing that with my mother since it brings about lots of argument"*. As regards the family's offering role, a 34-year-old woman described that *"The family suggests ideas, but they never intend to interfere with family issues"*. In addition, one of the sociologists participating in the study on the protection of privacy between couples with families emphasized the *"stability in the decision and view of the relationship between married life and their family and wife"*.

#### 2.4. Family Members' Management

This main category included three subcategories of members' relationship management, parenting skills, and problem management.

A lawyer focused on *"creating a climate of tranquility and positive energy"* and believed that *"The couple must try to turn home into an environment full of calm and positive energy"*. Regarding establishing an appropriate relationship between members, a family counselor emphasized providing direct, explicit, and appropriate communication between family members. Further, concerning creating a safe environment for expressing wishes, a psychologist highlighted noticing and respecting the emotions and feelings of family members.

Furthermore, parenting skill was another skill for having a successful marital life. One of the participating psychiatrists declared that *"Having proper parenting skills is one of the most important and effective factors in the success of the marital life"*.

About the role of the couples in managing family problems, one of the family counselors commented that *"The ability to manage and deal with crises is one of the important responsibilities of women and men in the family"*.

### 3. Personality Liberation

This theme contained two main categories as positive character stability and preserving human ethics.

Moreover, preserving human ethics had two subcategories including positive moral behavioral qualities and commitment to moral values.

#### 3.1. Positive Moral Behavioral Qualities

The participants believed that in married life, the spouse should have a variety of positive behavioral qualities including having low expectations, honesty, being disciplined and orderly, having verbal chastity, being flexible, and having an independent personality while not having inappropriate bias and not being suspicious and stingy. Respecting having low expectations, a 45-year-old woman stated that *"You know what, I myself don't have high expectations about what my husband gets for me"*. With regard to her husband's honesty, a 40-year-old woman maintained that *"Thanks to God, he is really honest; he has*

*never lied to me"*.

Concerning being orderly and disciplined, a 34-year-old man indicated that *"I do care about order and discipline; fortunately, my wife is OK in this regard"*. With respect to having verbal chastity, a 54-year-old woman claimed that *"One must know that his spouse is not rude and foulmouthed. This is really important"*. As for being faithful, a 43-year-old man pointed out that *"This is really important that your husband does not betray you"*. As regards chastity, a 36-year-old man believed that *"Having chastity is something I do care about"*. Regarding inappropriate bias, a 38-year-old woman mentioned that *"I am not for blindly bias and I don't enjoy bothering anyone"*. With respect to his husband's flexibility, a 45-year-old woman stated that *"He is not bull-headed at all and he never insists on what he says"*. Regarding not being suspicious, a 37-year-old woman expressed that *"He has often seen me talking with my colleagues at work. However, he has never said who they were and why they were talking like that"*. As for being stingy, a 45-year-old woman commented that *"One of the problems in unsuccessful families is that the man is a tight-fisted person"*.

#### 3.2. Preserving Moral Ethics

Participants stressed both avoiding illegal relations and cover-up. With respect to not having cover-ups, a 45-year-old woman asserted that *"Men should not be involved in any cover-ups"*. Concerning having illegal relations, a 40-year-old woman maintained that *"He should not be involved in any crime or wrong; by crime, I mean something which is against religion and law"*. Moreover, a 43-year-old man stated that *"I don't seek any friendship with bad friends. I do not seek crimes either"*.

#### 3.3. Positive Character Stability

This category included two subcategories of appropriate clothing corresponding to one's personality and the feeling of happiness.

With respect to appropriate clothing, a 34-year-old man declared that *"I care about clothing and well-groomed appearance"*. Additionally, a 49-year-old woman indicated that *"A woman should care about their appearance and clothes. She needs to be well-dressed and stylish"*.

Successful couples will feel "happy" despite enjoying other qualities such as patience, forgiveness, positive energy, optimism, good-tempered, and thankfulness, and the lack of revengeful. With regard to forgiveness, a 50-year-old man mentioned that *"We enjoy a great deal of forgiveness, both from my wife and me"*. About positive energy, a 42-year-old man described that *"My wife enjoys other positive features which make happiness come true; she is filled with positive energy"*.

Concerning patience, a 33-year-old woman maintained that *"My husband's patience never wears thin in our married life"*. With respect to revengefulness, a 50-year-old man claimed that *"One of my positive qualities is that I never*

seek revenge on anyone". Regarding being optimistic, a 38-year-old woman commented that "I have attempted to recognize our strong points; I won't see just the weak points". As for being thankful, a 39-year-old woman stated that "I have always appreciated God's blessing for my life". As regards happiness, a 54-year-old woman asserted that "I have always tried to keep home happy and lively by holding various parties in different occasions". With respect to being good-tempered, a 33-year-old man expressed that "One of my wife's outstanding features is her good temper with relatives, friends, and acquaintances".

#### 4. Development and Flourishing

This theme encompassed social maturity and spiritual power categories.

##### 4.1. Social Maturity

This main category included three subcategories of appropriate public relations, social dignity, and respecting the family of your spouse. The participating couples maintained that for having a successful life, their spouses need to have appropriate, yet limited, relations with their friends and have appropriate public relations. They should also be hospitable.

In appropriate public relations, with respect to his husband's relations with others, a 39-year-old woman stated that "He did not establish a friendship with bad friends from the very beginning". With regard to having appropriate social relations, a 35-year-old man indicated that "I am a sociable person myself. I do care what my wife says and how she behaves in public". Regarding the positive effect of being hospitable, he added that "One of the important issues in married life is wife's hospitality".

About social dignity, a 42-year-old man maintained that successful couples must enjoy social intelligence. Regarding the husband's social acceptability, a 49-year-old woman described that "My husband behaved in a way that everybody accepted him".

Regarding respecting the family of your spouse and giving priority to the spouse's family, a 49-year-old woman declared that "I put my husband's family before my own family". Moreover, as for respecting family, a 35-year-old man claimed that "It is really important that my husband respect my family and friends; thanks goodness, he is OK in this regard". Concerning preserving the etiquette of spouse's family, a 50-year-old man stated that "He did understand my family's desires and attempts to satisfy them". With regard to respecting the spouse's family, a 45-year-old woman mentioned that "When I get back home from my hometown, I get something as a gift for his mother. You know she had taken care of my children; that's the least I can do". Regarding a close and intimate relation with spouse's family and relatives, the participating sociologist in the study believed that "The husband should have close relations with the close relatives of his wife, especially her

mother and sister)".

##### 4.2. Spiritual Power

Spiritual power included three subcategories of principles and religious beliefs, ability to build security, and preserving the spouse's dignity.

In principles and religious beliefs and with respect to the importance of religious beliefs, a 49-year-old woman maintained that "Religious beliefs are important as well". A 35-year-old man emphasized the importance of 'Pleasing God' and indicated that "I see my own fortune in making God pleased and fulfilling my religious duties in the first place". The family counselor in this regard added that "The other aspect of a successful family is the importance of spirituality in the family". About the ability to build security, successful couples maintained that building security in the family goes hand in hand with creating a democratic environment, establishing economic security, fulfilling spousal responsibility, gaining the satisfaction of spouse and children, stressing the importance of family members' health and calmness, prohibiting spousal violence, and receiving spousal support.

With respect to a democratic environment, a 39-year-old woman stated that "We do nothing without consulting each other".

As regards the subcategory of responsibility, a 37-year-old woman commented that "One's husband has to be responsible".

Economic security refers to the couples' joint financial attempt, financial independence, and wife's financial independence. Concerning the positive effect of joint financial attempt, a 50-year-old man declared that "Our joint financial attempt was really important to ensure our success in life". Moreover, as for financial independence, a 34-year-old man mentioned that "We were completely independent in our life. Our families supported neither my wife nor me". Regarding the financial independence of one's wife, a 40-year-old woman expressed that "It is really pleasing if a woman is financially independent and spends her own money-".

Gaining satisfaction of spouse and children is often referred to as one of the decisive factors of spousal capabilities for building security in life. With respect to the importance of spousal satisfaction, a 34-year-old man stated that "You know, your partner's satisfaction is the most important thing. They should be satisfied in any regard". One of the participating psychiatrists added that "Both people should feel happy with each other".

About the importance of family members' health and peace and with respect to spousal mental health, a 37-year-old man believed that "It is really important that your wife is not edgy". As for establishing a peaceful environment at home, a 32-year-old man indicated that "I have attempted to make my wife relieved when she sees me".

Regarding the importance of family's physical health,

a 42-year-old maintained that *"We have always been grateful. Thank God, we are healthy and have healthy children. If there is something wrong with someone in your family, you will no longer feel happy"*. As regards the lake of behaviors that threaten spousal health, a 45-year-old woman declared that *"One of the reasons that husband and wife don't feel happy is that one of them is addicted"*.

In terms of the subcategory of spousal violence prohibition, the couples stressed prohibiting verbal and behavioral violence. Concerning verbal violence, a 45-year-old woman stated that *"Insulting and verbal violence is far worse than physical violence and beating up"*. With regard to the negative effects of physical violence on a successful marriage, a 54-year-old woman described that *"I have a friend whose husband is an engineer. Her husband used to beat her up very often such that she could not move for one week. She didn't feel happy although she didn't leave her husband simply because she had nowhere to go"*.

In the present study, preserving the spouse's dignity included respecting him/her, appreciating one's spouse and giving her the right to choose, and adoring one's partner. Concerning respecting the spouse, a 35-year-old man asserted that *"We have been living together for around seven years. However, she has not said even a word of disrespect and abuse to me and my family"*. With respect to appreciating the spouse, a 34-year-old woman commented that *"To me, it is really important that a husband cherished his wife"*. Regarding giving your spouse the right to choose, a 45-year-old woman mentioned that *"He has never said let's go to my mother's house. He has never made me stay somewhere. I cannot remember him saying how I should behave in front of his family. He let me do what I want to"*.

## Discussion

The aims of the present study were to identify the aspects of successful marriage from the perspective of successful Iranian couples and experts in marriage-related fields. The obtained concepts and ideas included four main themes.

### Recognizing and Understanding the Needs

This section refers to a men and women's needs for having a successful life. Knowing the families well enough and having proper personal knowledge are among the premarital needs that lead to making the right decision in choosing one's spouse through the guidance of counselors, family, and society. In one study, married students residing in Ahwaz maintained that knowing your partner well enough before marriage is the key to a successful marriage. They also asserted that their positive attitude toward marriage is the outcome of the premarital opportunity provided for them to acquire proper and sufficient knowledge from their partners (16). In another study, the importance of having sufficient premarital knowledge, initial charm and appeal, and being analogous with respect to beliefs, aims, interests, hobbies, and values were

also stressed in this regard (17). It seems that premarital courses and counseling can provide men and women with a wide variety of information on the psychological knowledge of men and women, as well as the criteria and aims of marriage, economic matters, and sexual issues that all help strengthen marriage (18). A study was done on the effect of the training pattern of premarital guidance and counseling based on a localized multidimensional approach on 24 couples from Tabriz. The findings of the aforementioned study indicated an increased extent of marital satisfaction, improved personality aspects and issues, improved relations, reduced marital conflicts, improved financial affairs management, and finally, bettered relations with family and friends (19).

Regarding the main category of married life needs, it is worth noting that spouses acknowledge and understand that they need to cooperate and put their spouse before their children. They also need to do their best to fulfill this goal. In another study, one of the main criteria for having a successful marriage was a cooperative criterion where successful couples acknowledge that they needed spousal support in different areas of their married life (16). The findings of another study on the effect of sharing housework on marital satisfaction in Korean, Japanese, and Chinese couples demonstrated that women were not satisfied with their husbands for having the lion's share of housework (17).

### Life Skills

Successful couples stressed the importance of various life skills such as love-making, communicational, and problem-solving skills, along with family member management.

In addition, the results of a study in Canada represented that the power of marriage relies upon intimacy, commitment, and respect (20). Finally, the other research highlighted the importance of love between couples as one of the most important factors in married life (21). On the other hand, failing to make and express love was referred to as the factor for creating emotional conflicts in married life (22). Sexual satisfaction, as part of love-making skills, was emphasized by our participants as well. According to other studies, sexual satisfaction is considered as one of the factors affecting a successful marriage (23, 24). Although marital life is merely proportional to sexual relations, it may be one of the most important causes of happiness and the lack of happiness in couples (25). Generally, training life skills as an important part of individuals' lives are suggested all over the world. More precisely, training some of these skills within counseling programs can help preserve and promote the quality of life (18, 26). Moreover, it is necessary to discuss different styles of love-making, the extent of love, and individuals' life assessment methods so that to help them with selecting the right and appropriate spouse and thus guarantee success in their

lives (19). Additionally, training life skills are proved to affect married women's increased marital satisfaction, self-expression, anger management, and reduced bad moods (27, 28). Sexual skill training is further stressed by couples concerning achieving sexual satisfaction (24).

In the present study, enjoying some communicational skills was approved to be effective on a successful marriage. It seems that enjoying the skill for establishing effective communication is the key to build a normal and safe relation. If two persons fail to relate their feelings, desires, problems, and expectations, they will not be able to establish an effective and appropriate relation (21)

Weak relation goes hand in hand with divorce, parental problems, stress, and home violence (29). Based on the findings of a study, skills like active listening to one's partner, expressing needs, being forthright and plain in expressing needs and desires were all considered important for ensuring a successful married life (23). Problem-solving skills help couples to have a realistic attitude toward problems and regard disagreements and conflicts as a challenge. This attitude helps the couples come to a similar viewpoint about their marital problems (30). Considering the importance of conflict management in married life and settling conflicts between the couples themselves and with their families were emphasized in other studies (17). Glaser in his choice theory mentions a merciful dialogue between the husband and wife as the only solution to marital problems. It is believed that success in marriage has a direct relation to learning the way of engaging in dialogue (31). Norgren et al observed the highest extent of satisfaction in couples who enjoyed appropriate strategies for dealing with problems, had appropriate communicational skills, were religiously active, and enjoyed a satisfactory economic status (32).

### Personal Liberation

The participants of the present study maintained that their spouses should have positive personality stability (e.g., appropriate clothing corresponding to their personality and the feeling of happiness), and preserve human ethics (e.g., positive moral-behavioral characteristics and commitment to ethical values). Studying the criteria of a successful marriage indicates a variety of factors for the feeling of happiness, including patience, optimism, as well as positive thoughts about the future and positive thinking. Moreover, some other positive behavioral characteristics of the spouse were referred to as 'cooperative and personal criteria' of a successful marriage. These characteristics encompassed showing honesty and flexibility, encouraging positive behaviors such as moral virtues, strengthening strong points, and having confidence (23). According to findings of a study on Finnish couples, two out of seven extractive themes were 1)patience, flexibility and humbleness and 2) commitment and dedication (33). In studying the determinant factors

of a successful marriage in couples from Tabriz, a variety of characteristics were referred to as personality factor themes (personal factors). Such characteristics included patience, forgiveness, contentment, kindness, conscientiousness, and commitment (34). In another study on traditional and modern successful couples, honesty, self-sacrifice, forgiveness, and respect were also mentioned as the important factors of success (35). Efficient personal characteristic is one of the effective themes on satisfactory marriage in Iran (17). In discussing successful parents' experiences, personal themes were stressed, including categories like forgiveness, contentment, and experience (36). Having compared the findings of the present study with those of other studies in this regard, one must acknowledge that enjoying positive personality characteristics is among the important factors of achieving a successful marriage. These findings were reported in most studies, but there was a sense of humor as a character in many studies, which was not observed in the findings of this research (37).

### Development and Flourishing

Social maturity (i.e., having appropriate public relations, respecting spousal family, and preserving spouse's social dignity) and spiritual capability (i.e., having religious and belief principles and building security) are the main categories extracted from this theme. According to previous evidence, spousal sociability was considered as the personal indicator of a successful marriage (34). In the study conducted by Fathi et al, respecting parents and supporting families were referred to as the positive effective factors of a successful marriage (17).

An important issue in spiritual capability is considering the concept of spirituality. For example, it is attempted to nurture one's sensitivity to one's self, others, supernatural creatures, and God in order to attain the needed humanity and complete humanity (38). Thus, any attempt to empower self, relatives, friends, and the environment fall in this category.

Similarly, faith and trust were reported as effective factors in studying the cultural criteria of a successful marriage with respect to behavioral and spiritual virtues (23). Another study regarding the effect of religious beliefs on marriage stability in American Christian couples, several themes were extracted, including saying prayers, conducting worship, fulfilling religious duties, and intimacy and sympathy (39). In other studies, commitment to religious values was mentioned as one of the important factors in this respect (16, 19).

Likewise, spousal violence prohibition was discussed when investigating security feeling. The findings of a study in Bandar Abbas, Iran indicated a significant inverse correlation between domestic violence and marital satisfaction (40). It seems that attending life skills courses can reduce spousal violence to a great deal (41).



Responsibility was considered as the other effective factor of a successful married life (23,40,41). Moreover, the role of consulting and asking for advice was highlighted as an effective factor in discussing the democratic environment of married life in other studies (37).

The other research emphasized the importance and role of economic security in a successful life and increased marital satisfaction (17). The other key issues of supporting the spouse were highlighted in other studies, encompassing health, building calmness, and gaining spousal satisfaction (33, 42).

With respect to physical/mental health and spousal threatening behaviors, an inverse correlation was found between marital satisfaction and spousal mental health (43, 44). According to the study conducted by Weiss, married people usually enjoy high levels of mental and emotional well-being. The emotional support of a married person in successful marriages can cure diseases, namely, coping with chronic diseases and other life-threatening events. These persons are at low risk for depression (45).

The findings of the present study and those of the other similar studies indicate that religious beliefs and spiritual capability are both important for ensuring a successful married life. Thus, family, society, communication media, and the educational environment ought to stress these issues when training young people.

In addition, the findings concerning the effective factors of a successful marriage did conform to those of the other studies performed in Iran and the other parts of the world. In all cases, the couples were in need of training courses for learning life, communicational, intimacy, sexual, and problem-solving skills in order to ensure success in life. Thus, training these skills has to be highlighted in premarital counseling, as well as training courses for couples prior to marriage (46). Among the strong points of the present study, one can mention the deepening of research problem, a continuous and long-lasting relation with the data, the internal/external revision of codes and categories, participant selection with the highest variety to increase the validity of the study, and the use of external peers and observers to increase data stability.

Most Iranian and non-Iranian studies have so far examined marital satisfaction (17,37,47) and few studies have focused on successful marriage (23,34,42). The qualitative study by Sahebdel et al was the only one that surveyed successful marriage indices in married couples with over two years of marriage experience in Tehran (23).

The results of this study are in line with those of our study although the present study only evaluated those couples with more than five years of marriage length. In our opinion, there is a similarity in the research background results in this regard. In most cases, studies were performed qualitatively using a grounded approach.

One of the strengths of this study was using the opinions of fourteen experts on successful marriages, which was

not addressed in the study of Sahebdel et al (23).

However, this study had some limitations including the researcher's lack of access to all the valid and related resources. Further, participants did not express all real-life facts and matters. Accordingly, the researcher attempted to observe behaviors and use field notes in order to minimize this limitation to a great deal.

However, due to the impact of cultural factors on marital satisfaction, as one of the factors of a successful marriage, it is highly recommended to conduct this study for various ethnic minorities, as well as groups enjoying different cultural values and couples who are unsatisfied with married life and divorced.

### Conclusions

With respect to the extracted themes, a successful marriage can be referred to as holy matrimony between a man and a woman. More precisely, the couple enjoys positive personality features and is committed to preserve the ethics. Moreover, they attempt to achieve social maturity, and spiritual powers manage the new life through appropriate premarital knowledge and the acquisition of necessary life skills. It is obvious that couples continue to promote their life skills, as well as maturity and spiritual capabilities in their married life to maintain and perpetuate their successful life.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

### Ethical Issues

The study was conducted after obtaining the approval of the Ethics Committee of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences (ID: Sbmu2.rec.1394.114).

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