

Perceived Emotional Intelligence and Marital Adjustment: Examining the Mediating Role of Personality and Social Desirability

Suvarna Joshi and Nutankumar S. Thingujam

University of Pune, Pune.

The present study was aimed at examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital adjustment over and above personality dimensions and social desirability. The sample comprised of 60 married couples. They responded to a set of four self-reported scales of the above variables. Results showed that cohesion and overall marital adjustment were related to all the sub-scales and overall emotional intelligence. Consensus and satisfaction subscales of marital adjustment were also related to overall and subscales of emotional intelligence except utilizing emotion subscale. Further results indicated that overall emotional intelligence's correlation with overall marital adjustment remained significant after controlling for social desirability, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Perception of emotion's correlation with overall marital adjustment, consensus remained significant after controlling for extraversion and openness. Managing self emotion's correlation with overall marital adjustment, satisfaction, and cohesion remained significant after controlling for social desirability, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. The other correlations did not remain statistically significant after controlling social desirability and significant personality dimensions.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Marital Adjustment; Personality; Social Desirability

Psychologically, Indian married life may be explained in many ways. It demands enormous adjustment from spouses which is also an important factor in determining family environment. Interpersonal conflicts in married life can create a lot of stress among spouses and other family members that; if prolonged can also lead to psychological disturbances. In the last few years, along with the economic sector the process of globalization has probably influenced political, cultural, and all other sectors of Indian society in the urban areas. Marriage system is perhaps no exception to it. It is observed that people have changed their attitudes toward marriage. Family structure has also seemingly undergone substantial

changes in recent times especially in the context of roles performed by husbands and wives. It seems traditional division of roles is no longer widely prevalent in Indian modern society; rather many spousal relationships are believed to be moving towards becoming more egalitarian. All these changes might be putting additional pressure on the individual and have perhaps made marital adjustment really a tough job.

Marital adjustment: Marital or dyadic adjustment may be conceptualized as a process and the outcome is determined by the amount of: "(1) troublesome dyadic differences; (2) interpersonal tensions and personal anxiety; (3) dyadic satisfaction; (4) dyadic cohesion; and (5) consensus on

matters of importance to dyadic functioning” (Spanier, 1976, p. 17). These aspects of adjustment are applicable to both married and unmarried couples ((Spanier, 1976). Marital adjustment can be explained with the help of psychodynamic and social learning models. Existing literature show that there are several tests available for the measurement of marital adjustment which is an important topic in the field of marriage study.

Emotional intelligence: According to ability model, emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive (e.g., identification of emotion from the facial expression of others), understand (e.g., understanding the transition of emotion from one component to another), use (e.g., using emotion to facilitate thought process) and regulate emotions (or management of emotion) (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). There are both self-report and ability measures of this model. In the ability measure the respondent has to select the most appropriate response as decided by the majority of the people in the society. The self-report measure can be considered as perceived emotional intelligence as it reflects perception of the emotion abilities but ability measure can be considered as a type of intelligence (Thingujam, 2004). However, there are other models of emotional intelligence which correspond to the facets of Five Factor theory of personality (McCrae, 2002). Finally, whether emotional intelligence is a type of intelligence is still a matter of debate and research on emotional intelligence has been actively continuing in spite of the several criticisms (see e.g., Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998; Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2008).

Emotional intelligence and marital adjustment: Fitness (2001) pointed out that emotion perception, understanding and reasoning about emotions, and regulating or managing emotions are important in marriage. However, Fitness further suggests that the link between marital happiness and

these aspects of emotional intelligence may not be completely straightforward. Epstein (1998) suggested that people who are skilled at reading other individual’s emotions may well use it for either constructive or destructive purposes. So, spouses may exploit partners’ vulnerabilities and insecurities for own purposes with the help of emotional intelligence abilities (Fitness, 2001). There is empirical evidence that couples with both partners low on emotional intelligence abilities show the lowest scores on different areas of relationship quality, that is, positive relationship quality, support (perceived availability of social support from one partner), and depth (perception of how secure, positive, and important the relationship is). However, no consistent scores on positive outcomes of relationship quality are found when couples with both partners score high on emotional intelligence abilities. Besides, it was also found that couples tend to have greater positive relationship when at least one partner has greater emotional intelligence abilities (Brackett, Warner, & Bosco, 2005).

Bricker (2005) found that self-reported overall emotional intelligence is significantly correlated with marital satisfaction. The study also reported that interpersonal skills needed to resolve conflict and foster intimacy between partners have shown to be important in determining successful marital outcome. In another study, married couples with higher self-reported emotional intelligence reported higher marital satisfaction (Schutte, Malouff, Bobik, Coston, Greeson, Jedlicka, Rhodes, & Wendorf, 2001). It is observed that these studies focus on overall emotional intelligence abilities or perception of it, not on individual dimensions.

Role of Five Factor theory of personality and social desirability: Bouchard, Lussier and Sabourin (1999) found that overall marital adjustment is correlated positively with extraversion, agreeableness, and

conscientiousness but negatively with neuroticism across the sex. However, openness is correlated significantly with marital adjustment among the men only, not among the women. In another study also, similar trend of the linkage between overall marital adjustment and dimensions of Big Five are observed across the sex but openness is not correlated with marital adjustment among both men and women (Cook, Casillas, Robbins, & Dougherty, 2005). Besides, self-reported emotional intelligence is associated with personality dimensions of Five-Factor theory of personality (see Thingujam, 2004 for an extensive review). The possibility of social desirability in self-report measure is common, so in the present study it was considered important to examine whether the link between emotional intelligence and marital adjustment is independent of personality and social desirability. To the best of our knowledge there is no such study till date. Based on the literature review the following hypotheses were framed:

1. Emotional intelligence is positively correlated with marital adjustment.
2. Emotional intelligence is correlated with marital adjustment over and above personality and social desirability.

Method

Sample:

The sample for the study comprised of 120 participants (60 couples) belonging to the age group of 25-45 years ($M = 32.33$, $SD = 5.61$). All the couples had completed at least one year of their marriage. They were from diverse educational and occupational backgrounds. All male participants were employed and among female participants 75% were working. The data were collected mainly from Pune city (Western India) and its suburbs. Most of the participants' mother tongue was Marathi. However, all of them had fairly good understanding of English. Hence, all the tests were administered in English.

Tools:

The NEO Five-Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992) is a short form of NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO-PI-R). The NEO-FFI contains 60 items that are to be responded to on a five-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" for the five domains namely, neuroticism (emotional instability), extraversion (extraverted, outgoing, active, and high-spirited), openness (being open to new experiences, having broad interests in life, and highly imaginative), agreeableness (being eager to cooperate and avoid conflict, compassionate, and good-natured) and conscientiousness (being well-organized, having high standards and striving for achieving goals). The scale is psychometrically sound and widely used.

The Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, & Golden, 1998) includes 33 items and is based on the model of emotional intelligence proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990). Participants respond to each item using a 5-point scale, including 1 as "strongly disagree," 2 as "disagree," 3 as "undecided," 4 as "agree," and 5 as "strongly agree". This measure yields a global score and higher score indicates higher emotional intelligence. The authors reported two-week test-retest reliability at .78 and alpha co-efficient reliability was .87. Later, Ciarrochi, Deane, and Anderson (2002) identified four subscales of SEIS, that is, perception of emotion ($\alpha = .76$), managing others' emotions ($\alpha = .66$), managing self-relevant emotions ($\alpha = .63$), and Utilizing Emotions ($\alpha = .55$).

Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Marlowe, & Crowne, 1961): The notion of social desirability is related to the honesty of a test response. According to Edwards (1957), "social desirability suggests the need to be accepted and approved, which tends to be confounded with other behavioural tendencies that the tester wants

to assess.” The MCSDS measures the amount of social desirability that a person wants to portray. The MCSDS consists of 33 items that have clearly desirable responses. For instance, “I am always willing to admit it when I make a mistake”, “I never resent being asked to return a favor” and so on. Respondents are required to answer such statements as either ‘True’ or ‘False’. All items are summed to give an overall social desirability score. This score simply reflects the individual’s need to present desired and culturally valued qualities. People who endorse many favorable items as given above score high on social desirability. Over a one month period, test-retest reliability was found to be .88. The MCSDS has shown convergent validity with constructs related to social approval.

Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS; Busby, Christensen, Crane, & Larson, 1995) is a 14-item test with three subscales: dyadic consensus (the degree to which couples agree on matters of importance to their relationship), dyadic satisfaction (the degree to which the couple is satisfied with the relationship) and dyadic cohesion (the degree of closeness and shared activities experienced by the couple). Cronbach’s alpha for RDAS was reported to be .90 and for subscales, namely consensus, satisfaction and cohesion they were found to be .81, .85 and .80 respectively. The RDAS is suitable for use among distressed and non-distressed couples.

Procedure:

Participants in the present study were approached individually with the prior appointment and requested to respond to the set of four questionnaires described above. General as well as separate instructions for each test were given after filling the demographic details. They were also informed about the confidentiality of their responses and their participation as a part

of the study. There was no time limit set for the completion of tests but usually it took one 45-50 minutes to answer a set of all four questionnaires. Participants were encouraged to ask doubts and requested not to discuss their answers with their spouses.

Results

Normal distributions of the data were checked before computing inferential statistics and found to be normally distributed. Table 1 shows means, standard deviations of all the variables used in the present study. To examine sex differences on emotional intelligence and marital adjustment measures, two One-Way-MANOVA were computed with sex as an independent variable. The MANOVA for marital adjustment measures produced a Wilks’ Lambda value of .99 and a corresponding $F(1, 108) = .11$, $p=.95$. The MANOVA for emotional intelligence measures yielded a Wilks’ Lambda value of .92 and a corresponding $F(1, 116) = 2.26$, $p = .06$. However, a separate One-Way-ANOVA was computed for the overall emotional intelligence measure for finding sex difference as one item of the overall emotional intelligence measure was not included in the four subscales of emotional intelligence. Result indicated that there is no sex difference $F(1,116) = .16$, $p=.69$.

Table 2 indicates correlations of all the variables. It is observed that the different components of emotional intelligence are significantly correlated with each other. All the internal consistency reliabilities of the overall emotional intelligence ($\alpha=.88$) and its subscales, that is, perception of emotion ($\alpha=.81$), managing others’ emotions ($\alpha=.68$), managing self-relevant emotions ($\alpha=.73$), and utilizing emotions ($\alpha =.70$) were found to be comparatively higher than the ones reported by Ciarrochi, Deane, and Anderson (2002).

Internal consistency reliability for the MCSDS was found to be .64 which is a little

lower than the rule of thumb ($\alpha = .70$) suggested by Nunnally (1978). Internal consistency reliabilities for the NEO-FFI were also found to be a bit lower except for conscientiousness ($\alpha = .71$), that is, .61 for neuroticism, .63 for extraversion, .49 for openness, .52 for agreeableness. Internal consistency reliabilities for overall marital adjustment ($\alpha = .75$) and satisfaction subscale ($\alpha = .73$) were adequate but somewhat low for consensus ($\alpha = .59$) and cohesion subscales ($\alpha = .65$).

Partial correlation was used to examine if the association between emotional intelligence and marital adjustment remained statistically significant after controlling significant variables. Results indicated that overall emotional intelligence's correlation with overall marital adjustment ($r = .34, p < .01, N = 80$) remained significant after controlling for social desirability, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Perception of emotion's correlation with overall marital adjustment ($r = .29, p < .01, N = 95$), consensus ($r = .25, p < .01, N = 99$) remained significant after controlling for extraversion and openness. But perception of emotion was not significantly correlated with satisfaction ($r = .17, p = .08, N = 102$) and cohesion ($r = .17, p = .07, N = 100$) after controlling for extraversion and openness.

Managing self emotion's correlation with overall marital adjustment ($r = .28, p < .01, N = 77$), satisfaction ($r = .21, p < .05, N = 83$), and cohesion ($r = .25, p < .01, N = 81$) remained significant after controlling for social desirability, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. But managing self emotion was not correlated with consensus ($r = .08, p = .48, N = 81$) after controlling for social desirability, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. Managing other emotion's correlation with overall marital adjustment

($r = .16, p = .13, N = 81$), consensus ($r = .17, p = .12, N = 85$), satisfaction ($r = .16, p = .13, N = 87$), and cohesion ($r = .07, p = .51, N = 85$) did not remain significant after controlling for social desirability, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Emotion utilization's correlation with overall marital adjustment ($r = .08, p = .43, N = 99$) and cohesion ($r = .18, p = .06, N = 105$) did not remain significant after controlling for extraversion and conscientiousness.

Table 1: Mean and SD for the measures of self-reported emotional intelligence, marital adjustment, social desirability and personality

Subscales	Mean	SD
1. SEIS: Perception of Emotions	36.39	5.40
2. SEIS: Managing Self Emotions	35.87	4.18
3. SEIS: Managing Others Emotions	35.57	4.33
4. SEIS: Emotion utilization	15.79	2.35
5. SEIS: Total	127.65	2.95
6. RDAS: Total	50.70	7.78
7. Consensus	23.30	3.48
8. Satisfaction	16.03	3.03
9. Cohesion	11.17	4.02
10. MCSD: Total	20.95	4.15
11. NEO-FFI: Neuroticism	20.99	6.02
12. NEO-FFI: Extraversion	28.95	5.38
13. NEO-FFI: Openness	26.12	4.81
14. NEO-FFI: Agreeableness	28.96	5.38
15. NEO-FFI: Conscientiousness	35.24	5.39

$N = 100$ to 120

SEIS = Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale
 RDAS = Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale
 MCSD = Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale
 NEO-FFI = NEO Five Factor Inventory

Table 2: Results of Pearson's product moment correlation between perceived emotional intelligence, marital adjustment, social desirability and personality

Scales	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1 POM	1.00														
2 MSE	.36**	1.00													
3 MOE	.36**	.57**	1.00												
4 EU	.37**	.54**	.50**	1.00											
5 EI:Tot	.75**	.79**	.79**	.70**	1.00										
6 MA	.32**	.41**	.35**	.21*	.45**	1.00									
7 N	-.13	-.40**	-.07	-.08	-.21*	-.20*	1.00								
8 E	.21*	.38**	.44**	.20*	.41**	.18	-.33**	1.00							
9 O	.26**	-.00	.08	-.34	.12	.14	-.30**	.14	1.00						
10 A	.15	.19*	.30**	.04	.23*	.34**	-.40**	.31**	.30**	1.00					
11 C	.09	.38**	.38**	.22*	.35**	.33**	-.23*	.29**	-.14	.16	1.00				
12 SD	.06	.41**	.24*	.08	.25*	.30**	-.36**	.27**	-.10	.43**	.30**	1.00			
13 Con	.22*	.26**	.29**	.11	.31**	.78**	-.10	.17	.03	.29**	.34**	.35**	1.00		
14 Satis	.19*	.40**	.30**	.13	.34**	.65**	-.30**	.10	.00	.27**	.14	.24**	.35**	1.00	
15 Cohe	.24**	.26**	.19*	.19*	.30**	.77**	-.10	.05	.23*	.17	.22*	.07	.40**	.19*	1.00

** p< 0.01 (2-tailed)

* p<0.05 (2-tailed)

N= Neuroticism, E= Extraversion, O = Openness, A= Agreeableness, C = Conscientiousness, POM = Perception of Emotions, MSE = Managing Self Emotions, MOE = Managing Others Emotions, EU = Emotion Utilization, EI = Emotional Intelligence, SD = Social Desirability, MA = Marital Adjustment N = 101 to 118

Discussion

The present study was focused at examining the link between emotional intelligence and marital adjustment over and above personality dimensions and social desirability. In the present study, emotional intelligence was considered as a perceived emotional intelligence since self report test by Schutte et al. (1998) was used. As previous studies found mix findings regarding the issue of gender differences in emotional intelligence (Schutte et al., 1998; Smith, Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2008) and marital adjustment (Bouchard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 1999; Smith, Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2008) it was tested in the present study and found no significant difference.

Emotional Intelligence and Marital Adjustment: The first hypothesis stating that emotional intelligence is positively correlated

with marital adjustment was accepted. This shows that emotionally intelligent couples tend to be well adjusted in their marital relationships. In particular, couples who score higher on perception of emotions, managing self emotions, managing others emotions, and emotion utilization tend to be more adjusted in their marital life. It is believed that ability to perceive emotions can help one to understand verbal, nonverbal emotional cues of his or her partner. Managing self emotions and others emotions perhaps help partners to resolve conflicts and by utilizing emotions they can probably maintain well being of their spouses and themselves. In this way, being emotionally intelligent can possibly facilitate adjustment and satisfaction in marital relationship. Overall, this result is in accordance with the previous findings (Schutte et al., 2001).

Role of Personality and Social desirability in the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Marital Adjustment: The finding that the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital adjustment remained statistically significant even after controlling social desirability shows that the relationship between these two variables is not affected by couples' tendency to give socially favourable responses, and that irrespective of this there are some components in the concept of emotional intelligence which are related to individuals' marital adjustment. Thus, the hypothesis stating that emotional intelligence and marital adjustment are correlated over and above social desirability was supported.

It was also found that the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital adjustment remained statistically significant even after controlling for significant personality dimensions (neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) indicate that couples' personality dimensions do not mediate the relationship between couples' emotional intelligence and their marital adjustment. Thus, the hypothesis stating that emotional intelligence is correlated with marital adjustment over and above personality was accepted.

It was further found that the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital adjustment remained statistically significant controlling personality dimensions and social desirability. This suggests that relation between emotional intelligence and marital adjustment is neither mediated by social desirability nor by personality. So, the emotional intelligence scale used in the present study can be utilized for training married couples to enhance their emotion-related skills to improve marital adjustment. The same emotional intelligence scale was employed by many researchers in emotional intelligence enhancement program and

found that emotional intelligence could be improved with the help of expressive positive writing among the students (Wing, Schutte, & Byrne, 2006) as well as military personnel (Thingujam, 2007). Such training can also be conducted among the married couples in addition to personality training in which NEO-Five Factor Inventory can be utilized in Indian context. In future research one can incorporate ability measure of emotional intelligence.

As Fitness (2001) pointed out one should, however remember that emotional intelligence alone does not guarantee marital happiness, and that spouses must have commitment to the idea of being married. Besides, both the partners should show caring and compassion to each other, and be ready to take responsibility (Clark, Fitness, & Brissette, 2000).

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Suvarna Joshi, Department of Psychology, University of Pune, Pune - 411 007, India.

Nutankumar S. Thingujam, PhD, Department of Psychology, University of Pune, Pune - 411 007, India. E-mail: Thingujam@unipune.ernet.in
Mob: 91-98505 03331