

Sexual Intimacy as Predictor of Narcissism and Feelings of Shame in Married Women

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One of the important aspects of marital relationships is having sexual intimacy which affects the improvement of the marital relationship. Sexual intimacy involves sharing romantic experiences with each other, the need for physical contact, arousal, intercourse, and relationships, which lead to sexual relationships and sexual satisfaction. Feelings of shame and narcissism are factors that can affect sexual intimacy between couples. The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the relationship between sexual intimacy and narcissism and shame in married women. The statistical population included all married women of Isfahan city. The sample size consisted of 164 participants that were selected through the convenience sampling method. Three questionnaires, Ruskin and Terry's Narcissistic Personality Questionnaire (NPI-40), Cook's Internalized Shame Scale (1993), and the Sexual Intimacy Questionnaire - Botlani et al. (2009) were used to collect the data. To analyze the data, the Pearson correlation coefficient and simple linear regression were used. The results revealed a significant negative correlation between sexual intimacy and narcissism ($P < .05$), and sexual intimacy was significantly positively correlated to feelings of shame ($P < .05$). Sexual intimacy could predict significantly 5.4% of the variance in 12.9% of the variance in feelings of shame.

Keywords: Narcissism, Feelings of Shame, Sexual Intimacy, Married Women

Society emphasizes marriage as an important two-way relationship in which sex happens, and sex is an integral part of romantic relationships, and marriage has been proven in every known culture. The desire for intimacy has biological roots and will continue in most people from birth to death. Sexual health is an important issue in couples' relationships and it helps the stability of marriage and the marital and sexual satisfaction of couples. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sex and sexual relations, and in the same way, it requires the possibility of increasing safe and enjoyable sexual experiences and freedom from coercion, discrimination and violence in marital relationships (Higgins & Hynes, 2018). The need for stable and intimate relationships with sex is one of the most important reasons for marriage for men and women. The creation and durability of an intimate relationship is strengthened by special emotional bonds. Intimacy, a feeling of closeness, is a romantic or emotional personal relationship with another person in order to express thoughts and feelings that are used as

a source of similarity and closeness. Intimate relationships in people's marital and family life is the most important emotional challenge in their lives (Nematzadeh Gatabi, Vaziri & Lotfi Kashani, 2020).

In recent years, the concept of intimacy has been considered as an important element in marital relationships. Intimacy is the main human need that grows from one of the basic human needs called the need for attachment. The need for intimacy includes the need for physical closeness, connection and contact with other people and is one of the necessities for the continuity, satisfaction and success of marriage (Namvaran Gerami, Moradi, Farzad, & Zaharakar, 2022). Sexual intimacy includes sharing romantic experiences with each other, the need for physical contact, arousal, sexual intercourse, and relationships, which lead to sexual relationships and sexual satisfaction. One of the basic human needs is the sexual need that must be satisfied within the framework of the family. Although the main purpose of forming a

family is not to satisfy the sexual need, it is one of its important functions (Shakrami, Davarnia, Zaharakar and Gohari, 2014).

DSM – IV describes people with narcissistic personality disorder as having excessive expectations, a proud sense of superiority and importance, needing the admiration of others, exploiting and abusing others, lacking empathy and taking refuge in secretive grandiose fantasies (Rahiminejad, Rezazadeh, Ghorbani and Derakhshan, 2018). According to Sadok and Sadok (2011), a narcissistic personality with symptoms of narcissism, mental preoccupation with imaginations of success, power, talent, beauty, and belief that he/she is an exceptional and special, being abusive in interpersonal relationships, lack of empathy and need. A narcissistic personality disorder is characterized by its extreme praise. Baumeister (2002) believes that narcissism is associated with positive and negative consequences, and some of its positive consequences include reducing depression, extroversion, initial agreeableness, and better performance in a group. On the other hand, Yang and Pinsky (2006) believe that thirst for attention, overconfidence, lack of empathy, aggression, and social incompatibility are some of the negative consequences of narcissism. Raskin and Terry (1998) discuss that early studies on narcissism classified it as a personality disorder. But now narcissism is considered both a type of disorder at the clinical level and a personality trait at the non-clinical level (Zaini Hassanvand, Javanmard and Guderzi, 2014).

Shame is one of the most important self-conscious emotions that has a significant impact on a person's sense of self, well-being, and vulnerability to psychological and personality disorders (Hojjat Khah and Masbah, 2015). Self-conscious emotions are when the self plays a central role and is associated with self-evaluation (Jokar and Kamali, 2016). This feeling is defined based on uncomfortable feelings such as disappointment, stupidity, and the desire to avoid being around others for fear of being rejected (Jamali Firouzabadi, Zarei Wasadi, 2013).

One of the unconditional components of strengthening marriage is "the couple's enjoyment of sexual intimacy". In this way, the greater the sexual intimacy of the couple in the

framework of marriage, the more the continuity and stability of the marriage increase. In order to enjoy self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-esteem, growth, and prosperity, couples should achieve at least "two-way sexual intimacy" (Vatankhah & Bakhshipour Roodsari, 2019).

Kargar, Davoodi & Mozafari (2019) stated that sexual intimacy is one of the important indicators of couples' satisfaction with each other. The findings showed that feelings of shame and guilt and difficulty in regulating emotions can predict women's sexual intimacy. The research of Anzani, Di Sarno, Di Piero, and Peronas (2021) showed that the characteristics of narcissism, sexual self-esteem, and sexual satisfaction were very vulnerable. Narcissistic traits had a negative relationship with sexual satisfaction, instead, sexual self-esteem had no direct relationship with sexual satisfaction. According to the previous results, one of the important aspects of marital relationships is having sexual intimacy which affects the improvement of the marital relationship, and also the self-esteem of the personality dimensions of the people may have a negative effect on the relationship. Also, on the other hand, considering the cultural issues in Iran, women may feel ashamed in sexual relations, since women are the foundation of family and childbearing, therefore, the present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the relationship between sexual intimacy and narcissism and shame in married women.

Method

Sample

The statistical population of the current research consisted of all married women of Isfahan city (about 18,235) in 2023. To select the sample internet implementation was used and questionnaires were designed online and the link was placed in social networks (WhatsApp groups and Telegram groups) where married women were members, so that married women who were willing to participate in the research could answer the questions. Answer Criteria for entering the research were considered; including married women who have been married only once, and five years have passed since their marriage and their age range was between 20

to 60. Based on Cochran's formula, the sample size was estimated to be 149 people with an error of 8%, and due to possible dropouts, 164 people were finally selected as a sample.

Tools Used

Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-40): This questionnaire was created by Raskin and Terry (1988) to identify non-clinical narcissistic personality. This questionnaire contains 40 components, the answers of which are pairs of "yes" and "no" items. This questionnaire includes 7 sub-scales of authority, showing off, superiority, entitlement, exploitation, self-sufficiency and pride. Raskin and Terry (1988) measured the validity of the questionnaire through the correlation of 7 components of the questionnaire with the total score of the questionnaire. The reliability of two halves was calculated through Gottman's coefficient and reported for a total score of 0.83. Zaini Hassanvand et al. (2014) checked the reliability of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha method and reported 0.52 for the whole scale.

Internalized Shame Questionnaire: This scale was designed by Cook (1993) to identify the internalized shame of individuals. This scale includes 30 items and considers 2 subscales of shyness and self-esteem. Answers are on a 5-point Likert scale (0-never, 1-very little, 2-sometimes, 3-often, 4-always). The reliability coefficient using Cronbach's alpha for the shyness subscale was .90 and for self-esteem was 0.90 (Cook, 1993). Rajabi and Abbasi (2013) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90.

Sexual Intimacy Questionnaire: This questionnaire was developed by Botlani, Ahmadi, Bahrami, and Shah Siah (2009) to assess sexual intimacy. This scale consists of 30 items, each item includes 4 options (always, sometimes, rarely, never) and its scoring is from 1 to 4. The reliability of this scale using Cronbach's alpha was equal to 0.81. In the research of Ghorbin et al. (2015), Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was found to be 0.88.

Results

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Research Sample with Regard to Age Groups

Age Groups	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20 to 29 years old	19	11.6	11.6	11.6
30 to 39 years old	67	40.9	40.9	52.5
40 to 49 years old	44	26.8	26.8	79.3
50 to 60 years old	34	20.7	20.7	100.0
Total	164	100.0	100.0	

According to the data obtained from Table 1, the most frequency is related to 30 to 39 years old with a percentage of 40.9.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Research Sample with Regard to Educational Level

Educational Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Diploma	33	20.1	20.1	20.1
Upper Diploma	11	6.7	6.7	26.8
Bachelor	57	34.8	34.8	61.6
Master	52	31.7	31.7	93.3
Doctorate	5	3	3	96.3
Post Doctorate	6	3.7	3.7	100.0
Total	244	100.0	100.0	

According to the data obtained from table 2, the highest frequency is related to bachelor's degree with a frequency of 57 and the percentage was 34.8.

Table 3. The Mean and SD of Sexual Intimacy, Narcissism, and Feelings of Shame

Variable	Mean	SD
Sexual intimacy	56.10	19,95
Narcissism	15.80	8,20
Feelings of Shame	45.71	12,95

The results of table 3 show the mean and standard deviation for sexual intimacy was (M=56.10, SD=19.95), narcissism (M=15.80, SD=8.20), and feeling of shame (M=45.71, SD=12.95), respectively.

Table 4. The Results of Pearson Correlation Coefficient between Sexual intimacy, Narcissism and Feelings of Shame (n=164)

Variable	1	2	3
Sexual intimacy	1		
Narcissism	-.232**	1	
Feelings of Shame	.359**	-.226**	1

**P<0.01

The results of the Pearson correlation coefficient show that there is a significant negative correlation between sexual intimacy and narcissism ($r=-.232$, $p<.01$). Also, there is a significant positive correlation between sexual intimacy and shame ($r=.359$, $p<.01$).

Table 5. The Results of Simple Linear Regression between Sexual intimacy and Narcissism

R	R ²	F	B	SD.E	Beta	t	Sig.
.232	.054	9.187**	-.557	.0184	-.232	-3.031	.003

Based on the Enter Regression, sexual intimacy could predict 23% of the variance for narcissism.

Table 6. The Results of Simple Linear Regression between sexual intimacy and Feelings of Shame

R	R ²	F	B	SD.E	Beta	t	Sig.
.359	.129	24.041	.554	.113	.359	4.903	.001

Based on the Enter Regression, the sexual intimacy scores could predict 35% of the variance in feelings of shame.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this research showed that sexual intimacy was correlated to narcissism and feelings of shame. Also, sexual intimacy can predict narcissism and feelings of shame. the findings of this study are in agreement with the researches of Anzani & et al. (2021), Mahmoudi & et al (2021), Miller & et al (2021), Saidi Moghadam & et al (2020), Green & et al (2020), Wu & et al (2020), Kargar & et al (2019), Moradi & et al (2019), Kordi & et al. (2016), Launer & et al (2016), Shakrami, & et al (2014) and Pancake (2012).

Wu, Durahi, Johnston, Naswall and Hanna (2020) revealed that feelings of shame were negatively related to intimacy, while also the feelings of shame scores were related to dependent personality behaviors. This study provided further evidence of the complex nature and multifaceted effects of shame. The results of Green, McLean, and Charles (2020) demonstrated narcissistic ambition was a positive and meaningful predictor of psychological abuse. The research of Moradi, Fatehizadeh, Ahmadi, and Etemadi (2019) concluded that women considered their sexual relationship with a narcissistic man to be insecure, and they also had the impression that their relationship was one-sided and strict. In addition, insecure relationships constituted several sub-categories including lack of sexual intimacy, sexual aggression and unwanted sex, and low commitment. There are two subsets for these relationships, including unrealistic and excessive expectations from the spouse commitment relationship, and the husband's lack of responsibility and cooperation. The results showed that sex was strongly influenced by the consequences of narcissism.

Kurdi, Aslani, and Aman Elahi (2018) found a positive relationship between secure attachment style and marital commitment and the moderating role of sexual intimacy and trust in the relationship between secure attachment style and marital commitment. The results showed that the secure attachment style leads to trust and sexual intimacy and improves the quality of interpersonal interactions, commitment, and the quality of marital relationships; on the

other hand, sexual intimacy makes couples lively and cheerful; Therefore, in order to create a balanced family structure, it is very important to form a safe attachment style that is the basis of trust and intimate marital relations.

When starting intimate and emotional relationships, people have an ideal image of each other. After marriage, couples have less motivation to impress their partners and find it hard to maintain their initial ideal images. As a result, ideal images give way to more realistic images, and initial emotional relationships begin to weaken, and finally, the continuation of this situation in some couples causes frustration and divorce (Hosseinnezhad Hallaji, Khademi, Alivandi Vafa, Esmali, 2021).

An intimate relationship generally refers to the degree of mutual dependence between two parties, including friends, partners, and lovers. But specifically, marital and sexual intimacy refers only to romantic and sexual relationships between husband and wife, which are usually shared by a man and a woman. Sexuality affects a person's life psychologically, socially, and physically. It is not possible to separate this desire from humans, and this desire has always played a role in attracting a sexual partner, establishing a relationship, creating intimacy, and continuing the generation. Sexual behavior is related to the intimate relationship between couples, sexual desire, and sexual intimacy. The results showed that the frequency of sexual intercourse, sexual desire, sexual satisfaction, and family functioning can predict marital intimacy. In the explanation of this finding, it can be said that sexual intimacy at home causes a positive relationship between couples and this positive relationship increases marital relationships and intimacy (Mahmoudi, Ameri, and Farhadi, 2022).

Interpersonal dysfunction is a prominent feature of pathological narcissism, suggesting the need for clinical interventions, such as assessing interpersonal violence in the treatment of individuals with pathological narcissism, as well as addressing potential conflicts with partners and family members of the narcissist (Day, Townsend & Grenyer, 2022). Some studies have shown that vulnerable narcissistic traits

negatively affect sexual intimacy. Sexual self-esteem completely mediates this relationship. While grandiose narcissistic traits are not directly related to sexual intimacy, they are only related to sexual self-esteem, which explains the indirect effect of grandiose traits on sexual satisfaction. Sexual self-esteem with high pathological narcissistic traits shows a relationship between narcissistic traits and sexual intimacy (Anzani, Di Sarno, Di Piero, & Peronas, 2021). It is believed that narcissism is a complex and multidimensional thing and it predicts personality traits and dysfunction in different areas of married life. The findings showed that women face many challenges in their sexual relationships when living with a narcissistic person. Sexual relations are influenced by the husband's narcissistic personality and, in turn, his narcissism is influenced by several cultural factors. It seems that Iranian culture provides more possibilities for men, and opportunities to satisfy their narcissistic needs and desires (Moradi, Fatehizadeh, Ahmadi, and Etimadi, 2019).

In the experiences of shame, different psychological aspects are in conflict with each other, the susceptibility to shame arises from the discrepancy between the self and the ideal self. Feelings of shame include feelings of inferiority, weakness, and the desire to hide flaws, these feelings can play a role in reducing sexual intimacy. Couples sometimes do not interpret each other's verbal and non-verbal messages correctly, and these misinterpretations can lead to feelings of shame and confusion of emotions, and cause disruption in their communication, and disruption in communication also leads to a decrease in sexual intimacy (Kargar et al., 2019). Considering that sexual relations are among the most important issues of married life in terms of importance and reflect the couple's satisfaction with other aspects of the relationship, it can be a good measure of the overall health and well-being of couples' relationships. Women always feel embarrassed and ashamed in establishing intimate and close relationships with their husbands, and because of this, they feel dissatisfied with marriage (Abassi, Bagian Kole Merz, Dargahi, and Qamari Givi, 2015). Many Iranian couples suffer from sexual

dissatisfaction, but they feel ashamed to bring it up and talk about it, and they are unaware of its effect on marital dissatisfaction and, as a result, dissatisfaction with their lives (Badihi Zarehi and Mousavi, 2015).

Pancake's research (2012) clarified that the social taboos originated from parents and the government and that eventually shaming is the cause of sexual issues. Education and training, foster a conservative and sexually repressive mentality in many individuals. This educational system can be seen through the prevalence of orgasmic disorders in women. A training class should be held for couples to reduce the feelings of shame between men and women and to increase sexual intimacy between them. Before marriage, a series of tests should be taken for couples to determine their levels of narcissism and whether that has no problem with sexual intimacy. Counselors should hold training workshops for couples who have narcissistic spouses and give people the necessary training to deal with them.

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