

**Research Article**

## **A COMPARISON OF ATTACHMENT STYLES AND SELF-ESTEEM IN WOMEN FILING FOR DIVORCE AND NORMAL WOMEN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** The study aimed to compare the attachment styles and self-esteem among women filing for divorce and normal women in 2014. **Method:** The research population in this study was all married women in Shiraz including women filed for divorce and normal women who had referred to attorney offices and healthcare centers during May and June, 2014. To this end, the study employed a causal-comparative and retrospective research design in which field methods were used to collect the data. A sample of 160 women was selected as participants. Then, the participants were divided into two groups: the first group included 80 women filing for divorce who had referred to court or attorney offices in Shiraz. The second group included 80 normal women who were satisfied with their marital life and family and had not referred to family prosecution attorney offices so far. The second group was selected using purposive sampling method from patients referring to health centers. They were nearly matched with the first group in terms of the duration of marriage and urban district of residence. The instruments used to collect the data included *Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire* and Cooper-Smith Self-Esteem Inventory. The collected data from administering the questionnaires to the participants were entered in SPSS Software (Version 18) and analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics such as comparison of means (MANOVA) and independent samples *t*-test. **Results:** The results showed that the scores of attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) among women filing for divorce were higher than normal women. Besides, there was a significant difference between the two groups. Considering self-esteem and its subscales, normal women had higher means than women filing for divorce; pointing to a significant difference between the two groups under study. **Conclusion:** Health policymakers are required to consider life skills and parenting skills training in order to improve family relationships.

**Keywords:** Attachment Styles, Self-Esteem, Women Filing For Divorce

### **INTRODUCTION**

Family, as the smallest social unit, serves a foundation for forming human society and preserving human emotions. Besides, family is considered as a factor effecting individual behavior. The family is also organizes and arranges individuals' actions and is a natural environment, a milieu for love, and a constant support in different aspects of personal life. As such, the family role in daily life is always on the rise. When family patterns are useful in achieving our goals, the family will be functionally efficient. However, when such patterns are not useful and interactions occur with stress and pathological behaviors, the family does not function efficiently (Behbudi *et al.*, 2009).

The cornerstone of the family is marriage. Marriage requires cooperation, empathy, unity, love, kindness, patience and a sense of responsibility. Living together begins with the belief that only death can separate the married people.

Couples also hold such believes at least at the beginning of their shared life. But this is not the reality in the sense that shared life is influenced by several factors, some of which may lead couples to dispute, conflict, mental separation, and even divorce (Farhangi, 2000). Divorce is one of those harms that have an impact on family functioning and is mutually influenced by family functioning. Divorce leads to many social problems and social stigma, affecting mental and social health of the people and leading to many problems in people's activities and interests (Aranda & Irene, 2004).

## **Research Article**

Similarly, the attachment is one of the characteristics that affects family functioning and is mutually affected family functioning. Attachment is a deep emotional bond we feels with certain individuals in our life so that when we are interacting with them we feel joyful and at the time of stress we feel tranquility for being with them (Breek, 2010).

Hollist and Miller (2005) conducted a study on “The relationship between attachment styles and quality of the marital relationship among middle-aged couples”. They found that attachment styles influence the quality of the marital relationship. It was also found that insecure attachment styles are associated with the quality of the marital relationship. Besides, it is possible to change insecure attachment of couples whose relationship is disrupted into a secure attachment style through emotion-focused therapy.

Siebel (2004) in a study of decision to divorce states while various types of are formed in early childhood, they can affect the attachments in adulthood.

In addition to attachment styles, self-esteem is one of the characteristics that affects the family and is affected by the family. Rogers (1997) sees self-esteem as the continuous assessment an individual makes of his/her self-worth. Accordingly, when individuals consider themselves as valuable beings, they will realize themselves more quickly. Cooper Smith (1967) suggests that self-esteem is definable and provable and can be considered as evaluative feedbacks an individual holds about oneself. These feedbacks are related to one’s strengths, values, approvals, disapprovals, and effectiveness.

Erol and Orth (2013) in their study of the effect of self-esteem on satisfaction with the marital relationship on 5 independent samples of couples found that self-esteem is a predictor of individuals’ satisfaction with their relationship with their partner and the partner’s satisfaction with the shared life.

Shackelford (2001) in a study of self-esteem in marriage found that couples’ self-esteem is negatively correlated with marital conflict and lack of marital satisfaction. In other words, couples with higher levels of self-esteem are more satisfied with their marital life and thus enjoy a more stable life.

Stressful and critical factors experienced by couple at the time of divorce and after it, create a cycle of the issues and problems that unintentionally require countless changes and developments as well as adaptation to them. This cycle itself results from early and primary experiences of people’s life especially in the lap of the family and from a sense of security, emotional and psychological attachment, and their self-esteem. In addition, the cycle is affected by mental conditions of people filing for divorce and in particular of women (due to their metal and psychological sensitivity). Self-esteem and attachment style are among factors that can decline severely in the process of divorce and in the post-divorce period for women filing for divorce compared to normal women. The consequences of these changes overshadow all areas of life from the everyday issues to the economic, social, psychological, and personality conditions and even the goals set by a woman. Accordingly, the present study aims to compare the attachment styles and self-esteem between women filing for divorce and normal women in order to gain some insights on the problem in hand and to functionally explore strategies to prevent harms associated with divorce.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Method**

The research population in this study included all married women in Shiraz including women filed for divorce and normal women who had referred to attorney offices and healthcare centers during May and June, 2014. To this end, the present study employed a causal-comparative and retrospective research design in which field methods were used to collect the data. A sample of 160 women was selected as participants. Then, the participants were divided into two groups: the first group included 80 women filing for divorce who had referred to court or attorney offices in Shiraz. The second group included 80 normal women who were satisfied with their marital life and family and had not referred to family prosecution attorney offices so far.

The second group was selected using purposive sampling method from patients referring to healthcare centers. The two groups were nearly matched in terms of the duration of marriage and urban district of residence. The instruments used to collect the data included Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Questionnaire and Cooper-Smith Self-Esteem Inventory.

**Research Article**

**Table 1: Comparison of employment, education, and how to select partners in the groups studied**

Normal		Divorce Applicant		Status	
Number (percentage)	Count	Number (percentage)	Count		
Percent	Count	Percent	Count		
47/5	38	20	16	Employee	
11/25	9	8/75	7	Lecturer	
11/25	9	16/25	13	Free	Job woman
28/75	23	52/5	42	Housekeeper	
1/25	1	2/5	2	Unanswered	
0	0	1/25	1	Infra Diploma	
46/25	37	28/75	23	Diploma	
121/25	97	55	44	License	Education
31/25	25	15	12	Master's degree or higher	
0	0	0	0	Unanswered	
16/25	13	21/25	17	Own	
17/5	14	23/75	19	Parent	
43/75	35	32/5	26	Consult parents	with How to choose a spouse
12/25	17	21/25	17	Friends	
1/25	1	1/25	1	Unanswered	

**Table 2: Results of descriptive variables attachment styles (anxiety, avoidance), self-esteem of Subscales of the public and self-esteem, self-esteem, family, social, self-esteem and self-employment / education) for ordinary women (N=80)**

maximum	At least	Standard deviation	Average	Total	Variable
5/78	1	1/13	2/9	232/17	Attachment - anxiety
5/33	0/83	0/98	3/03	242/94	Attachment - Avoid
48	24	4/79	36/66	2933	Esteem (total score)
26	8	3/36	18/4	1472	Public esteem
8	2	1/52	6/01	481	Self-esteem, family
8	2	1/4	6/32	506	Social self-esteem
8	2	1/28	5/92	474	Self-employment / education

**Table 3: The results of descriptive variables attachment styles (anxiety, avoidance), total and subscales of self-esteem (General self-esteem, self-esteem, family, community and self-esteem, career / academic) divorce women (N = 80)**

Maximum	At least	Standard deviation	Average	Total	Variable
6/06	1/44	1/18	3/87	309/78	Attachment - anxiety
5/83	1	1/13	2/65	212/22	Attachment - Avoid
46	15	6/88	29/65	23/72	Esteem (total score)
25	8	3/74	15/11	1209	Public esteem
8	1	1/74	4/78	383	Self-esteem, family
8	1	1/64	5/01	401	Social self-esteem
8	2	1/5	4/73	379	Self-employment / education

**Research Article**

**Table 4: Correlation matrix of variables in the divorce women (N=80)**

7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Variable
						1	(1) attachment - anxiety
					1	0/149	(2) attachment - Avoid
				1	** -	** -	(3) Self-esteem (total score)
					0/567	0/314	(4) public esteem
			1	**0/943	** -	** -	(5) self-esteem, family
		1	**0/542	**0/713	0/516	0/352	(6) self-esteem, social
	1	**0/552	**0/616	**0/776	0/443	-0/101	(7) self-employment / education
1	**0/402	**0/307	**0/635	**0/705	0/413	-	
					** -	** -	
					0/443	/0344	

0/001<p\*\*

**Table 5: Correlation matrix of variables in normal women N= (80)**

7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Variable
						1	(1) attachment - anxiety
					1	**0/302	(2) attachment - Avoid
				1	0/181-	**0/433-	(3) Self-esteem (total score)
			1	**0/913	0/141-	**0/416-	(4) public esteem
		1	**0/542	**0/726	0/166-	**0/413-	(5) self-esteem, family
	1	**0/455	**0/509	**0/726	0/089-	*0/222-	(6) self-esteem, social
1	**0/461	**0/338	**0/510	**0/688	0/192-	*0/234-	(7) self-employment / education

0/001<p\*\*

0/005<p\*

The collected data from administering the questionnaires to the participants were entered in SPSS Software (Version 18) and analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics such as comparison of means (MANOVA) and independent samples t-test. Besides, all hypotheses were tested at significance level of 0.05 (P = 0.05).

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results from testing the first research hypothesis indicate that show that the differences in attachment style (anxiety and avoidance) scores between women filing for divorce and normal women are significant (P = 0.001, P = 0.0001). The results of this study are consistent with findings of other research such as Majrs (2011), Seibel (2004), and Finney (1996) who stated that secure attachment styles can affect individuals' commitment towards their emotional relationship. In the same vein, Hollist and Miller (2005) found that attachment styles affect the quality of the marital relationship and thus the increased likelihood of divorce.

The results of a study by Akhavi *et al.*, (2003) indicated that there is a significant difference between normal women and women filing for divorce in terms of attachment styles and their level of forgiveness. Results of previous studies (e.g. Ghafuri & Golparvar, 2009; Rasouli & Farahbakhsh, 2009; Shokrkon *et al.*, 2006; Rezazadeh, 2002; Besharat, 2006; Atari & Mehrabzadeh, 2006) point to the fact that the greater the couples have features related to avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles and the less they enjoy features associated with the secure attachment style, the greater will be the possibility of predicting the marital relationship breakdown. In contrast, if characteristics of the secure attachment style are more

### **Research Article**

frequently present in couples while the characteristics of the avoidant and ambivalent styles are less dominant or non-present among couples, the greater will be the success of the marital relationship.

This finding can be explained in the light of the fact that the concept of attachment to the partner is considered one of the rewards of marriage for both husbands and wives. For instance, in a marital relationship which is characterized by the secure attachment style, couples are more likely to love each other, to be sociable, to announce their helplessness, to demand support, to modify their negative emotions in a constructive manner in problem solving, and finally make more efforts to maintain long-term relationships. On the contrary, couples who are characterized by insecure attachment styles are less likely to trust each other, pay less attention to the satisfaction of their basic needs such as comfort, care, and sexual satisfaction, are more obsessed and preoccupied with their partner, talk less with each other, and thus are less committed to each other. Therefore, such couples are more likely to take steps to cut their relationship and eventually get divorced.

The results of testing the second hypothesis showed that the differences in total self-esteem scores and its components are significantly different between women filing for divorce and normal women ( $P = 0.0001$ ). This is in line with the results of previous studies such as Errol and Orth (2013) and Star and Davila (2008) who found self-esteem as a predictor of the satisfaction with relationship with partner and the satisfaction with marital life.

One possible explanation for this finding is that low self-esteem scores are associated with negative emotional stability such as fear, sadness, hurriedness, anger, feeling of guilt, and hatred. Accordingly, the participants with lower self-esteem scores tend to be more characterized with impulsivity, aggression and vulnerability; features that are among causes of divorce and separation.

Research shows that not only self-esteem is associated with satisfaction with the marital relationship (Skiangula and Murray, 2009) but also serves as a predictor of satisfaction with long-term marital relationship (Oeth *et al.*, 2012). Shockford (2001) also found that couples' self-esteem is negatively correlated with their marital conflicts and marital dissatisfaction. In other words, couples that have greater self-esteem are more satisfied with their marital life and consequently lead a more stable life.

In fact, the perceptions and judgments people have about themselves determine how they deal with different issues. As a case in point, a person with low levels of self-esteem, self-worth, and self-respect, might turn to isolation, withdrawal, aggression, and anti-social behaviors that affect the marital relationship and ultimately make couple file for divorce.

In line with findings of the present study, Terry (2002) observed that the increased self-esteem is crucial for the prevention of problems that may be caused by low self-esteem (even in marriage). Accordingly, people with high level of self-esteem show characteristics such as psychological maturity, stability, realism, comfort, and high ability to tolerate frustration and failure. While people with low self-esteem lack such characteristics.

Consequently, the higher the level of such characteristics, the higher satisfaction with marital satisfaction and the lower the likelihood of getting divorce. This can be partly explained in the light of the fact that people with lower self-esteem think their partner has negative attitudes towards them and this raises concerns about being rejected by the partner; reducing love and commitment in marital relationship plus couples' greater tendency for getting divorce. Therefore, it can be concluded that self-esteem is seen as a factor making progress and gain success in the marital relationship. In addition, the environment plays a significant role in forming self-esteem and the satisfaction with the married life is a product of exchanging rewarding behaviors that are caused by higher levels of self-esteem. On the other hand, the lack of self-esteem will reduce the marital satisfaction and the quality of marital relationships by creating distress and negative interactional patterns.

Overall, the results obtained from this study indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between women's self-esteem and the continuity of their married life. In explaining this finding, it can be suggested that people who have high self-esteem express their opinions and ideas fearlessly and confidently. In contrast, people with low self-esteem are less assertive and their inability in expressing their demands make them feel lonely and experience the lack of emotional support. Furthermore, as such



### Research Article

people fear that they may not act perfectly they are not able to express their feelings and this may finally lead to marital conflict and consequently the increased rates of divorce.

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**Research Article**

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