

## **Investigation of Effective Factors on Women's Sexual Disorder in Final Years of Marital Life (A Qualitative Approach)**

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### ***Abstract***

Based on the conducted interviews, the divorced or divorcing women suffer from dissatisfying sexual relationships with their husbands in the final years of the marital life. The present study has been carried out aiming at investigation of effective factors on women's sexual disorders. The samples of this research were selected based on a purposive sampling method from among 40 divorced and divorce applicant women in the Iranian city of Shiraz. The research was accomplished via a constructivist approach using a qualitative method, Grounded Theory and the data were collected through an in-depth interview technique. In order to achieve the theoretical framework, the categories of high conflict-driven increased sexual dissatisfaction of couple, meta marriage relationships of husband, sexual aversion of wife and her non-attachment to her husband were identified via three phases of open, axial, and selective coding. By segregation and composition of three core components of the research in selective coding, the final category was obtained as "women's sexual disorder" which may affect other categories as well.

**Keywords:** Sexual problems, Sexuality, Sexual dysfunction, Sexual orientation, Sexual behavior, Interpersonal relationships, Grounded theory.

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## 1. Introduction

There is a meaning behind every action (Weber, 1972). The actor achieves this meaning, as his guide in the interaction process, from interpretation of his current situation as well as his perception of another action in the same situation. Therefore, there is a close relationship between the action of the actor and the meaning that lies behind it, and the actor selects the means of influence given the aforementioned meaning and takes part in the interaction. The meaning which the actor obtains from interpretation of the situation and another action at the same time comes from both his rationalization from the past and his feelings to other person and his action and the situation in which they see themselves (Homans, 1961). In this sense, the actor is affected by different actions during the interaction and selects his own action based on the numerous variables influencing that situation. Action and interaction between a couple spring likewise from the interpretation of mutual behaviors, the meanings of these behaviors and the emotions that lies behind one another.

According to Levinger, failure of a marital life is determined based on the intricate balance between meeting the expectations of the partner, the appeals and barriers to preserve or terminate the relationship, and the current alternatives for termination of the marital life. He maintains that there is a positive relationship between appeals of a relationship and its rewards such as family income, companionship, and sexual intercourse. On the other hand, there is a negative relationship between appeals of a relationship and the costs of the marital life (time and energy). Certain difficulties (such as religious and financial problems) may cause couples to preserve their relationships (Mohammadi Asl, 2009). As Bach et al., (2005) believe different factors affect the libido of people. These factors could be classified in two groups of physiological and psychological factors which the first includes pregnancy, menopause, alcohol, substance dependency, uterus cancer, diabetes, etc. and the latter group comprises anger and guilt-feeling to the spouse, concern on losing control and being left by the sexual partner, no pleasure in physical contact, communication problems with the spouse, etc.

Based on the multidimensional model of Levin (2003), libido is a power that encourages people to certain sexual behaviors and includes three components of a) sexual drive which is a biological component which refers to physiology, anatomy, and endocrine activity of endocrine glands; b) sexual motivation which is a psychological component which itself is affected by three factors of general psychological condition of an individual such as feelings of happiness and sadness, interpersonal relations such as mutual agreement, disagreement and differences, and

social context including relationship duration and infidelity; c) sexual desire which is a cultural component and reflects the values and laws associated with sexual expression that have been taught in childhood and may be reconsidered during the life. He maintains that libido ranges from aversion, disinclination, and indifference to interest, need and passion (Levin,2003).

The previously carried out studies demonstrate a mutual relationship between marital satisfaction and libido. Teimourpour et al., (2013) revealed in a study that insecurely ambivalent attachment style and sexually guilt feeling make up 49.8% of libido variance. In another attempt, Mehrabi & Dadfar (2003) drew a conclusion that maladjustment in relationship and other factors result in sexual action disorder. Foroutan & Milani examined in a research the prevalence of sexual dysfunction among divorce applicant in Tehran. Also, the results of other studies have indicated that 66.7% of men and 68.4% of women have been dissatisfied with the sexual intercourse in their marital life (Movahed & Azizi, 2011).

The present study aims at identifying interpersonal causes in relationships between couples that lead to sexual dysfunction. Accordingly, this research was carried out to answer the following questions:

- What relationship does exist between the quality of marital life and a woman's sexual function?
- How a woman's sexual satisfaction or dissatisfaction affects her libido to her husband?
- How interest or disinclination to husband affects a woman's sexual function?

## **2. Method**

The qualitative research methods fit more with socio-cultural studies since they tackle more with value systems, mentality and views and beliefs of people. The current study benefitted from an inductive qualitative method. A qualitative study refers to any research which provides findings through methods other than statistical or quantitative techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In this research, the grounded theory was used in line with the method of Glaser in which the data must be experimental, i.e. the researcher is required to collect and analyze the data through objective and experimental ways. The inductive type of this theory brings the researcher about innovation and freedom of action and makes the research process much more flexible (Mohammadpour, 2012).

## **2.1. Participants and procedure**

In the present research, using purposive sampling strategy, those individuals and places were selected that provide purposive awareness on understanding the research statement and the phenomenon under study.

For this purpose, the private and public marriage and family therapy (MFT) centers of the Iranian city of Shiraz were considered as the appropriate places with divorced and divorce applicant women.

The sample size of the research is determined in grounded theory by theoretical saturation of categories (Rabani & Abbaszadeh, 2009). Given the research purpose, the data of this study reached the theoretical saturation via conducting a set of interviews with 40 divorced or divorcing women. The average ages of women were 19 and 30 at the time of getting marriage and divorce, respectively. The average duration of marital life for the participants was 11 years.

In-depth interview was the main technique for data collection in this study. Given the different collaboration of interviewees, the time duration of interviews varied between 45 to 120 minutes. In grounded theory method, sampling and analysis must be accomplished immediately one after another and the latter is expected to direct the data collection. Data analysis starts with open coding and as it approaches the final steps, the selective coding fits more the process (Strauss & Corbin, 2011).

## **2.2. Reliability**

Qualitative approaches use often two methods of member check and auditing to achieve the reliability (Iman & Boustani, 2010). In order to make the above check by the members, following the aforesaid three coding phases in the current study, the participants were asked to provide their views on the findings of this study and judge about the authenticity of the results. In this regard, the participants confirmed the findings of this research as well as its description and research model and found it a reflection of their actual social world. Different steps of coding and exploring of categories in the auditing technique undergone the control and supervision of a number of specialists in methodology and family sociology and were approved by the above experts. Also, the scholars referred frequently to raw data to make a comparison between the aforementioned data and the structuralism of the theory.

## **3. Results**

This phase provides the results of data analysis based on the three-step coding process. In the open coding, over 12 concepts were explored. The investigation of

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concepts in axial and selective coding stages revealed three main categories of high conflict-driven increased sexual dissatisfaction of couples, sexual aversion of woman and her non-attachment to her husband. Finally, the core category of “family sexual dysfunction” was obtained. The categories obtained in this study are as follow:

a. High conflict-driven increased sexual dissatisfaction of couples

The majority of interviewees maintained that they did not have a satisfactory sexual relationship with their husbands in the final years of their marital lives. This indicates failure of men and women in establishing a satisfying sexual intercourse during the ending years of the marital life. The reasons of the participants were different emanating from their different life circumstances; however, all were in common in terms of non-attachment to the partner, being emotionally discouraged to the partner and the marital life. This category is made up by intolerance of the spouse’s traits, emotional distance, dominance of problems over the pleasure of a satisfactory sexual relationship, intensified conflicts and disinclination to have a sexual intercourse, gradually reduced sexual relationship, non-acceptance of personality traits of the spouse that brings about a cold and dissatisfying intercourse, substance dependency, emotional gap, and break of the sexual relationship.

A number of couples experienced satisfactorily sexual relationships during the early years of marital life but lose it later because of increased differences and tensions and emotional distance from each other. These people started their marital life mostly with a lovely relationship. They enjoyed convenient conditions at first which went on with reduced emotions later on account of increased differences. An interviewee briefed her marital life trend as:

“Finally, we got married despite the objections of our families. The first year of our life was good... I experienced a convenient pregnancy free from any stress ... but, after several years, I could not stand any more... I needed his sexual intercourse but he was not interested. Our sex had become somehow a duty and I could not feel it aptly. Our conditions got worse in the last two years in a way that he did not show any affection to me. Everything between us was gone.”

The interviewee stated that as time elapsed, the emotional relations between her and her husband decreased and their marital life could not enjoy high quality any longer. The attenuated emotions and reduced marital relationship enjoyed an interrelation in which each intensified another. In other words, the emotions and sexual relationship were involved in a fruitless circle, deteriorating one another toward frivolity and vanity in life. This worsens so much that some men resort to sexual relations out of marriage:

“After my husband got acquainted with a new guy, he received a key to an empty house.”

This case shows that the husband has met his libido out of home concurrently with a reduction in sexual intercourse at home.

In a number of cases, the couples preserve their pleasant emotional relationship as long as they have satisfactory interactions with each other. However, by entrance of an external factor such as alcohol or substance dependency, the differences get intensified which entails a reduction in the quality of the relationship:

“Our marital relationship was of high quality. We were among the best... both were satisfied. I liked his physique, but after a while, he got involved in drugs and it was worsened later. Our differences were increased... I complained more and more... he used to get home very late and get up late in the morning. We used to quarrel first, and then, having a pleasant sex. This made the tension decreased in the next morning; however the arguments were run again... our differences continued and I saw him as a disgusting man. I could not stand longer... we were doing sex, but it was disgusting actually.”

This participant elaborated well on the powerful role of a convenient sexual relationship in overlook of problems and increase of flexibility in confronting with the difficulties of the marital life. The impact of psychological satisfaction of a pleasant sexual relationship has been so deep that, in some cases, it has made women to pass over signs of problems in early years of the marital life:

“Within 10 months of our marriage contract, everything was fine. He understood me well and I enjoyed much because I had not experienced any sexual relationship before. Actually, sex is something making you ignore many issues, e.g. you know something goes wrong (i.e. substance dependency of husband), but you do not react against it.”

Another interviewee who has experienced a pleasing start in her marital life stated her idea about the effect of quality of interactions on the sexual relationship:

“Everything was good at the beginning, but we faced problems after a year passed. Our problems started since one of my husband’s relatives passed away when he was on his way to help us for movement; he died in an accident. I did not feel any affection from my husband. Our sexual relationship was not in a good mood. It was good at the early years of my life; we asked for sex both... but later and following the above happening, it was just me who asked for such a thing. I found erotic pills in his clothes while we had no sex in the last year... even he used to sleep in separate beds. One day I got home and saw he was sitting by his friend and a prostitute...”

One of the participants who had experienced a lovely marriage after a four-year friendship with this man came to the conclusion that she could not bear some of her husband's behaviors; thus, she made attempts to bring some changes in her husband's behaviors and habits:

"I tried much to change many of his bad habits. He got acquainted with noble and celebrated families. Everyone praised me, but he was foul-mouthed. He used to leave me unnoticed; he did not make compliments on me. I did everything to solve this problem, but I failed. I asked him for sex but he was not interested in that. Our sex was like a duty and I could not feel it well."

Failure in accepting the personality traits of the partner destroyed all the emotional relationship between the above couple and weakened their sexual relationship. This made the woman – who had fallen in love someday with her husband- have sexual intercourse just like a predetermined duty. In this step, the marital system failed in meeting the sexual and emotional needs of the couple. Finally, an external factor – a bad companion – blew this inefficient marital system and set the stage for destroying in full.

Another interviewee believed that her refusal from approaching her husband came from drowsiness – the physical and psychological aftermaths – stemming from alcohol and substance dependency:

"He used to resort to alcohol when he was away from drugs. When he had alcohol, I was not interested in having sex with him because I believed he was not in his real personality, his real 'self'; at this time, I hated to have sex, but he wanted it much. We did not have any sex in almost ending two years of our marital life due to his regretful conditions; he could not do it at all; he was engaged in drugs so that his life was made up of only drowsiness and intoxication."

### **3.1. Husband's metamarriage relations and woman's sex aversion**

This category refers to the disinclination and refusal of woman from approaching her husband due to his metamarriage relationships and a sense of aversion in woman to him. This category comprises the concepts of constant humiliation of woman and her refusal from having sex, the sexual diversity of man and woman's refusal from sex, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) as deterrent factors against sexual relationship of the couple, overt metamarriage relationships of man and woman's emotional distance.

In some cases, the metamarriage relationships of husband on one hand and the humiliation of woman on the other hand have made the woman to hate her husband and finally have sex reluctantly following the request or by force of her husband.

“When I found out that he had sexual relationships with others, I refused to sleep with him in any way... I felt disgusting. I lost my libido... I accepted to sleep with him but I did it unwillingly. We used to finish our sex often with quarrel. He complained much and said that you are sick and have to see a doctor. Why you are doing this to me? But it was, actually, his behavior that caused these. He used to humiliate me always and compared me with others even in sex. That is why I left his relationship because, for example, he used to compare me with actresses and say ‘if she2 was here, we could take different positions... this made me to hate him.’”

A participant, who has had unstable emotional relationship with her husband, admitted that she was not interested in having sex with her husband because of his metamarriage relationships and also his physical violence:

“He wanted to sleep with every woman he wished. After my third pregnancy, I caught him unexpectedly talking in private with a girl who worked at my workshop. We had not much sex... and I was not good at it. He said ‘you are not sexually wise and do not know how to satisfy me’. I did not wish to sleep with him and stood away from him. I could not convince myself to sleep with someone who had beaten me in the morning.”

In this case, the husband puts that his wife is not a sex-wise, while his wife admits that she cannot have sexual relationship with her husband under negative emotional force resulting from his physical violence and metamarriage relations.

Another interviewee believed her husband’s metamarriage relations and HIV infection as the main reasons of her refusal from having sex:

“Our marital life was good during the early years, but I could not have intercourse with him in the last 5-6 years when he asked me. I was afraid of AIDS and also he was not good-looking as well that is not desired for me as a woman.”

### **3.2. Non-attachment to husband**

This category refers to the absence of love and emotional attachment to husband. Most of these marriages suffer from a dissatisfactory start in a way that either these marriages are forced by the groom’s family to accept the suitor, or they happen based on a false assumption of girls on increase of love after the marriage. The category

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1. An Iranian or foreign actress



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includes the concepts of forced marriage and refusing sex, physical violence and sex aversion.

A participant to this study elaborated her experience of a forced marriage and lack of post-marriage love and as a result, failure in having sexual intercourse:

“I was 18 or 19 years old when I received my diploma in education and got married then. It was a marriage forced by my family. After a month of our marriage, I figured out that we could not understand each other. I wanted to take a divorce, but it never happened and I lived with him for 30 years. We barely had sexual intercourse, maybe 4 times in a year. We were going into sulk mostly; we talked but did not sleep with each other. I preferred this to avoid having sex with him... I did not want him approach me.”

Another interviewee commented on disinclination to husband and impact of this on sex in marital life:

“At the beginning, I loved him and used to express it. However, our relationship got worse as we went on to communicate with each other. Our intercourse was very bad ... my husband used to masturbate. I tried to satisfy him although I was not happy with it. I knew and did it as a duty. He did not know how to do it, and I was not satisfied with our sex.”

It goes without saying that given the emotional and psychological state of the interviewee, doing sexual intercourse as a duty and only with the aim of meeting the relevant needs of the husband neither brought her a pleasure nor satisfied what her husband sought in their relationship. As a result of the husband's failure in doing sex well and his resort to masturbation, the low-quality sex relationship between them got worse, leading to an emotional gap and an increasing distance in their sexual and emotional relationship.

#### **4. Discussion**

The present study investigated the causes of sexual disinclination in women in ending years of the marital life. The conducted interviews unveiled three main categories of high conflict-driven increased sexual dissatisfaction of couples, the husband's metamarriage relationships and sexual aversion of woman, and woman's non-attachment to her husband.

According to the carried out analyses, some interviewees started their marital life with love, but involved in differences with their husbands later. With increased tensions, the sexual relationships weakened resulting in reduced libido and sex disinclination in a way that almost all participants admitted their low-quality sexual

relationships during the years ending in divorce. Dissatisfaction to the marital life has affected the women's libido either consciously or unconsciously.

A sense of aversion to husband on account of his infidelity was another factor which influenced the women's sexual relationship with their husbands. The metamarriage relationships of men affected negatively their wives so much that they lost their libido and stood away from their husbands.

Non-attachment to husband and disinclination to him have been other elements which increased the distance between a woman and her husband. A number of cases also indicate women who suffered from disinclination to their husbands on account of constant conflicts with them. In many cases, the women who were not attached to their husbands at the beginning of their life did not enjoy an increasing post-marriage love and this led them to a sense of sexual disinclination to their husbands. Some of these women got married based on the false belief that they would enjoy an increased emotions and love to their husbands. However, most of the aforementioned women got married forced by their families.

Based on the Symbolic Interaction Theory, it is possible to elaborate the women's process to reach sex aversion, since like other social systems; family is formed by actions and interactions among its members. The interaction process is a relationship which is established between two persons (Tarde, 2003) or between two human minds (Simmel, 1908). Moreover, this is a social process as well (Weber, 1924), because it puts two human minds against each other, make them involved in one another and this involvement continues through the time, although this "involvement" and "going against each other" may result in a convergence or a divergence between their minds (or mentalities) (Tarde, 2003). In this situation and based on the meaning the person perceps, the judgement on others and the subsequent suitable behavior are made (Sharon, 2000). According to Mead, human beings make attempt to blame or follow their actions and behaviors given their desired values and purposes. Considering the significance of this concept in human views, it, as a human mechanism, enables human being to be capable of understanding the phenomena in the surrounding setting including values, and conducting his/her actions in line with the meaning s/he receives from the values. Therefore, what individuals get aware of is the value they achieve during the meaning finding process (Skidmore, 2000).

Investigation of the interviews conducted with women revealed that the dissatisfaction resulted from the husband's actions in the marital life has led to inconvenient impression and imagination of him for his wife in a way that due to this mental perception of objective circumstances, the woman's emotion is affected

making her losing her interest in having sexual relationship with her husband owing to her annoyance and discomfort and in some cases, hatred of her husband.

The achieved results of this study are consistent with those of researches by Teimourpour et al. (2013), Naeimi (2012), Movahed & Azizi (2011), Aliakbari (2010), and Mehrabi & Dadfar (2003).

## 5. Conclusion

The present research demonstrated that many divorced or divorcing women under study suffered from sexual disorder in the final years of the marital life. Investigation of on the conducted interviews showed that three categories of high conflict-driven increased sexual dissatisfaction of the couple, the husband's metamarriage relationships and sexual aversion of woman, and woman's non-attachment to her husband were the main causes of sex aversion in women.

Accordingly, it is concluded that having interest in sexual relationship is affected by satisfaction of the marital life in a way that lower psychological satisfaction of the husband and marital life entails woman's reduced interest in having sexual intercourse with him.

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