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Function of life meaning and marital communication among Iranian spouses in Universiti Putra Malaysia

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Abstract

Previous researches have demonstrated that meaning of life has an essential role in human's life. It is believed that meaning of life is an important issue in matrimony. However, there is a gap in literature to explain any relationship between meaning of life and marital communication. Purpose in Life Test (PIL), logo therapy, and Marital Communication of ENRICH were administered to fifty seven married spouses. The findings indicated the reliability of the employed instruments. In addition, the results highlighted a significant relationship between marital communication and meaning of life.

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Keywords: Couple, Marital Communication, Life Meaning

1. Introduction

Individuals, generally, get married for specific reasons such as fear of loneliness, finding meaning in life, experiencing independency and loving. It is worth noting that continuous of matrimony may depend on factors such as existence of meaning in life, marital satisfaction and well communication. Marital communication, undoubtedly, influences on spousal relationship (LBlanchard, Hawkins, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2009). Poor communication, for instance, causes some problems in spousal life, so speaking if there is no understanding between the couples, divorce would be the eventual outcome.

Indeed, spousal/personal factors are recognized as fundamental issues in the marital communication (McCann & Biaggio, 1989). Furthermore, the Existential Theory which is advocated by Frankl, emphasizes on the role of finding or making meaning in life for a better quality of marital life (V. Frankl, 1984, 1988; J Lantz, 2004). This claim is also supported by some other scholars, as they initiated the notion that purpose in life is associate with sexual relationship in matrimony (Tripp, et al., 2009).

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Even though there is an extensive research on the Purpose in Life Test, but no recent research investigating the PIL, specifically with marital communication has been reported. Therefore, this is the aim of the present research to evaluate whether there is any relationship between meaning of life and marital communication. Based on the findings of this research, counselors and social workers can pay more attention to the mentioned factors during their therapeutic processes.

2. Meaning of life

Since meaning of life plays an important part in the life of human being, Frankl's meaning in life can be a valuable asset in the theoretical work of this field. The review of the literature shows that a lower PIL score relates to a number of negative behaviors, while a higher PIL is associated with behaviors that are more positive (Molasso, 2006). Researchers show that having a sense of meaning in life is a strong and consistent predictor of psychological well-being (Molasso, 2006). Zika and Chamberlain (1992) reported that "meaning in life is consistently related to positive mental health outcomes, while meaninglessness is associated with pathological outcomes" (p. 135).

As a matter of fact, if people lose their meaning and purpose of life, they would experience existential emptiness, which eventually leads them to negligence, helplessness, emptiness, and despair (V. Frankl, 1988; Jim Lantz, 2001; Loonstra, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2009).

Frankl (1984, 1988) declared that human being discovers the meaning of life in several ways.; primarily "by creating a work or doing a deed" (V. Frankl, 1984, p. 115). Frankl further elaborates that, Human being's work or vocation leads to life meaning as well. He also believed that meaning could be derived from experiencing "nature and culture" or "by experiencing another human being in his very uniqueness—by loving him" (p. 115). Moreover, Frankl noted that human beings can find purpose in life even "when [he/she has] confronted with a hopeless situation" (p. 116). What matters, Frankl underlines, is how a person transforms that personal tragedy into achievement; in other words, "If we have our own why of life, we shall get along with almost any how" (Nietzsche & Parkes, 2005). Emphatically, existence of life meaning influences the stress and coping process throughout the life time (Lazuras & Delongis, 1983). In like manner, two different studies, Newcomb and Harlow (1986) found that perceived meaninglessness in life mediated the relation between uncontrollable stress and substance use. Harlow, Newcomb, and Bentler (1986) concluded that having purpose in life results in greater levels of happiness.

3. Objective of the Study

The objective of the present study was twofold. Firstly, it aimed to assess the reliability of the employed instruments among Iranian couples in Universiti Putra Malaysia; secondly, attempted to investigate the relationship between the function of life meaning and marital communication.

4. Methodology

4.1. Population and Sampling

The population of the study was the Iranian married postgraduate students of Universiti Putra Malaysia. A total of fifty seven completed questions were returned out of two hundred distributed questionnaires, representing .28 % return rate.

4.2 Instrumentation

Insert *Purpose in Life Test* (PILT). Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) developed the Purpose in Life Test (PIL), based on Frankl's (1953) Theory of Purpose in Life, to measure the degree of sense of purpose a person experiences. The PIL is a 20 item, 7–point Likert-type Scale.

Previous studies have provided evidence of PIL's effectiveness in determining levels of occupational meaningfulness (Crumbaugh, 1968), degree of engagement in college campus activities (Doerries, 1970), and lesser

degree of purpose among prison inmates (Reker, 1977). In addition, other studies have shown that those persons with higher PIL scores suffer less anxiety and have greater self-confidence (Yarnell, 1971), self(Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969), and social attitudes (Pearson & Sheffield, 1975). Practically, They feel greater satisfaction with their lives, as well (Reker & Cousins, 1979), have more positive attitude towards the future (Pearson & Sheffield, 1975), and experience increased emotional stability(Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969).

The reliability of the scale was 0.90 which has been assessed by Crumbaugh & Maholick (1969), Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler (2006). The validity of the instrument to measure Frankl's construct of life meaning, and test-retest was supported by some researchers (Crumbaugh, 1968; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Molasso, 2006; Morgan & Farsides, 2009).

Marital communication. In this research, marital communication was measured by Enriching and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication and Happiness (ENRICH) marital satisfaction scale. This scale was developed by Olson, Fournier and Druckman in 1985; and has high levels of reliability and validity (Larsen & Olson, 1989; Larson & Olson, 2005; David H. Olson & Olson, 1999). ENRICH has been validated in various researches and confirmed solid reliability; coefficient alpha reliabilities of the scales is .76 for communication (Cited in Sanai, Alaghband, & Hooman, 2000). The scale of marital communication includes ten questions in form of Likert Scaled.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Reliability Test

Purpose in Life Test

There are 20 items for PILT. The mean score of the 20 items ranged between 4.6 and 5.8, where the minimum score is 1 and maximum score is 7. Besides that, all of the items fall below 2 standard deviations. Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha if item deleted for each item are well below Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items (.889). The overall alpha was .884 which indicates that there is high internal consistency of the PILT. These findings is in line with the previous research of PILT that was conducted by Molasso (2006) , Morgan and Farsides (2009).

Marital Communication of ENRICH

There are 10 items of this instrument. However, the alpha if item deleted is greater than Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items for two items. This statistics indicates that the items are not stable and reliable. Therefore, the two items were deleted. Upon deletion, the reliability of the test was rerun. The mean score of the items range between 3.77 and 3.85, where the minimum score is 1 and maximum score is 5. Besides that, all of the items fall within the range of 1 standard deviation. Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha if item deleted for each item were well below Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items (.787). The overall alpha is .762 indicated that there were internal consistency of the Marital Communication of ENRICH. Similarly, the findings of this study supported the studies of Olson , Miller (2007) and Olson (2000), which provided evidence for the reliability of this instrument.

5.2 Relationship between Meaning of Life and Marital Communication

This study made use of Pearson Correlation to investigate the relationship between meaning of life and marital communication. At 5% significant level, i.e. $\alpha=.05$, the finding indicated that there is a remarkable relationship between them ($r=.283$, $p=.033$). Although, there was a significant relationship, but this relationship was very moderate. To the best of the researcher knowledge, there has been no study conducted to examine this relationship. Hence, further study is needed to replicate the findings with a larger sample size.

6. Conclusion

One of the main issues in the life of human being is meaning of life. This individual issue seems to carry over later into the spousal life. Obviously, managing the life situations cannot happen without any hope to survival or to live; in another register, finding or making a meaning for spousal life as well as individual life plays a significant

role for the continuity of matrimony. It is of great importance to find the reason(s) or factors that associate in the weakening of marital communication. The present study, provided evidence that there is a significant relationship between meaning in life and marital communication. Nevertheless, it should be taken with cautious until future study replicate the findings. In the light of this investigation counselors and psychologists can establish new models for marital communication.

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