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Exploring the Components of a Comprehensive Model Governing Successful Marriages: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: A successful marriage is a dynamic growing relationship in which both partners continue to grow to achieve personal satisfaction. Building a successful life depends on a successful marriage. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the components of a comprehensive model governing on-time marriages among Iranian married men.

Methods: This study was conducted using a qualitative thematic analysis approach. Using a homogeneous purposive sampling method, 14 married men in Bushehr were selected and interviewed. The collected data were analyzed using the content analysis method.

Results: The analysis of the data from the interviews revealed three main categories related to on-time marriage among men including having a family that supports marriage, a marriage loving character, and the conditions facilitating marriage.

Conclusion: Following these findings, it can be argued that a successful marriage depends on three important components of personality, requirements, and family supporting the on-time marriage. Thus, the improvement of marital life also depends on multidimensional corrections made by taking into account these factors. Accordingly, some measures need to be taken to promote marriage among young people and make them interested in marriages. Furthermore, families need to support their children and provide facilities for them to have successful and on-time marriages. Finally, social institutions and officials are required to facilitate conditions for people to have successful marriages.

Keywords: Successful marriage, Qualitative research, Thematic analysis

Introduction

Marriage is an important and natural process in human life that has existed in all cultures and eras in various forms (1). It is one of the most complex human relationships that serves as the foundation for family (2). Marriage is also a link between two people with different personalities that leads to the formation of a family (3). Marriage is a special human issue (4) and is known as a socially stable bond between a man and a woman (5), which begins with the choice of a partner, one of the most serious decisions in a person's life. The method, rules, and criteria for choosing a partner vary from one culture to another and also from one society to another. People sometimes choose their spouse on their own and sometimes the spouse is introduced by other people such as parents, family members, etc (6). A successful marriage is a dynamic growing relationship in which both partners continue to grow to achieve personal satisfaction (7) and

in addition to meeting the sexual and emotional needs of the partners, respond to his or her economic needs, and balance his or her social and cultural relationships (8).

The Holy Qur'an considers the purpose of marriage as peace, purity, intimacy, and mercy (9). A healthy family is the foundation of society's health and one of the effective and influential factors in a healthy society is on-time marriage. Thus, building a successful life depends on a successful marriage, and goals and motivations such as a human desire for generational continuity, economic and spiritual needs, etc. involve in marriage and family formation and these factors have varied in different periods of human history. However, a major challenge currently facing young people in Iranian society is the delay in marriage. Thus, it is essential to identify important factors that can lead to on-time marriage and help people to select spouses and form a successful marital life. Identifying the influential factors such as love

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and affection, understanding, commitment, effective and constructive communication, caring for each other, and having peace can pave the way for a successful marriage. Marriage is one of the main and important stages in the life cycle of the family (10) and like other social phenomena in any society, follows specific norms in that society. Following the current cultural norms in Iranian society, marriage issues have their own characteristics. God Almighty says in the Qur'an: "*And it is among His signs that He has created for you wives from among yourselves, so that you may find tranquility in them, and He has created love and kindness between you. Surely in this there are signs for a people who reflect*" (Ar-Rum, verse 21). Given the importance of marriage, previous studies have addressed its different dimensions.

Dey and Ghosh showed that factors such as respect for emotions, attitudes toward marriage, expressing love, paying attention to the spouse's views, ignoring the spouse's weaknesses, sexual adjustment, mood, value, taste, and interest are important factors that can lead to a successful marriage (7). Tariq et al showed that traits such as loving, caring, and understanding are very valuable for boys and girls. Besides, using a grounded theory method, the authors developed a three-stage theory for selecting an ideal spouse, which includes describing individual schemas when choosing a spouse, explaining other important schemas, and understanding schemas of the cultural context of young adults (11). Asoodeh et al found that successful couples have characteristics such as the ability to solve personal problems, mutual understanding, managing financial expenses, spending time with family, being friends, and respecting each other (12). Asoodeh et al showed that successful couples trust each other, consult with each other, are honest, believe in God, make decisions together, are committed to each other, and have friendly relationships (13). Boykin explored couples' experiences and unique perspectives on successful marriages and identified commitment, communication, shared values, spirituality, intimacy, and family had been widely addressed in the literature (14). Khodadadi Sangdeh et al examined the characteristics of a successful marriage and identified four main themes including individual, couple, socio-cultural, and religious contexts (15). Sahebdel et al showed that individual, interactive, family-of-origin, and cultural indicators were the main successful marriage indicators (16). Karimi Sani et al identified the determinant factors of a successful marriage in the order of importance including (a) factors related to the relationship between couples, (b) individual and personality factors, (c) moral and spiritual factors, (d) cultural and social factors, and (e) family factors as effective predictors of successful marriage among couples living in Tabriz. The results also indicated that the choice of spouse was made more by the individual and through information provided by the parents and family members who played the role of supporters, guides, and in some cases an obedient role with a focus on the ability to provide financial costs and cultural similarities (17).

A review of the studies published in the field showed that little attention has been paid to factors affecting on-time marriage in men. The evidence also shows that unfortunately in Iranian society, young people avoid marriage for various reasons, and the delay in marriage is not only a personal issue but also an important social issue. Currently, having a stable and successful marriage is one of the most important challenges facing young people on the one hand and social activists and institutions on the other. A successful and on-time marriage can be one of the factors that reduce many social harms. Although this social challenge is considered by experts and concerned people in this field, only some have succeeded or are likely to have such marriages. Thus, an important way to promote on-time marriages among young people, especially young men is to raise their awareness of the factors influencing the occurrence of on-time marriages. However, this issue has not been addressed adequately in studies published in this field so far. Thus, if a study focuses on this issue among male participants, it can contribute to developing a local model as a valuable guide for facilitating on-time marriage for young men who are about to get married. Accordingly, the present study aimed to discover the components of on-time marriages through qualitative content analysis. Although both girls and boys play a role in the formation of marriage, men in most cultures are usually the initiators of marriage. Moreover, in the Iranian culture, men mostly propose marriage to girls. To this end, the focus of this study was on men to identify the factors that contribute to the occurrence of on-time marriages among young men.

Methods

The present study was conducted using a qualitative thematic analysis (18). This exploratory study also focused on the perceptions of the participants (married men) and their experiences that led to their on-time marriage. Therefore, it aimed to discover the factors affecting on-time marriage in married men that have so far been less addressed in the literature. Identifying these factors can help provide practical guidelines for young people who are going to marry. The research population included Iranian men who were living in Bushehr province in 2019/2020. The participants in the research sample were selected using homogeneous purposive sampling. The sample size was determined based on data saturation. Accordingly, after interviewing 14 participants, the data were saturated as no new theme or information was detected with additional interviews. The inclusion criteria in the present study were married

people interested in and willing to participate voluntarily in the study and narrate their experiences. The exclusion criteria were getting married after the age of 30, not having a successful marriage, and filing for a divorce. To collect comprehensive and detailed data, the participants were selected with maximum variation to take into account the differences in their occupation, education, and age. After obtaining informed consent from the participants and explaining the objectives of the study, the researcher assured them that the information provided by them and their identities would remain strictly confidential and that their statements in the interviews would be used without any alteration or distortion. The participants were also assured that the recorded voices in the interviews would be deleted after the analysis was completed. They were also told that a copy of the published article would be given to them if they wished. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews that included open-ended questions and probing questions to encourage the participants to provide in-depth narrations of their experiences. The interview questions were developed by reviewing the literature and surveying subject-matter experts. Each interview began with general questions about the experience of marriage (e.g. I would like to know about your experience of marriage. Could you describe it? How did you get married? Who motivated you to get married?). Furthermore, probing questions were asked for clarification and gaining more information (e.g. Can you explain more about this issue? or Can you make your point clearer?).

The sequence of questions depended on the interview and responses provided by each participant and the arrangement of the questions was not the same for all participants. Each interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes and the time and place of the interviews were determined in advance by the researcher upon the participants' agreement. The collected data were analyzed using content analysis, which is typically used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in qualitative data. This data analysis method converts scattered and diverse data into rich and detailed data. In this approach, the emphasis is on participants' perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the problem in question. Content analysis was performed in six stages including getting familiar with the data, generating primary codes, searching for themes, reviewing and revising the extracted themes, defining and naming themes, and preparing a report (19). The steps taken to get familiar with the data are detailed as follows:

- *Getting familiar with the data*: No matter if the researcher has collected the data himself or the data have been made available to him, the important thing is that the researcher contemplates the data and understands the content.
- *Generating primary codes*: This step begins after the

researcher has read the content of the interviews and is familiar with the data. In addition, the researcher prepares a list of primary codes of key and important points. Therefore, this step requires generating primary codes from the data.
- *Searching for themes*: In this step, the analysis focuses on a wider range of codes, the codes are sorted into themes, and all the coded data related to each of the themes are identified and collected.
- *Reviewing and revising the themes:* At this step, the researcher prepares a list of themes and refines them. The main source for creating thematic clusters is the extracted themes.
- *Defining and naming themes:* In this step, the created thematic clusters are examined and analyzed. After creating the thematic clusters, the researcher must return to the original text and analyze the codes with the help of these clusters.
- *Preparing a report:* The last step involves performing the final analysis and reporting the findings (19).

To establish the rigor of the data, the four criteria proposed by Guba and Lincoln including credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability were used (20). To assess the credibility of the data, after analyzing the interviews, the content was returned to the participant to confirm the accuracy of the results and revise them if necessary. To check the transferability of the data, it was tried to select the participants with maximum variation to take into account their occupational, educational, and age differences. To check the confirmability of the results, two experts in the field of qualitative research and marriage counseling experienced in working with adolescents reviewed the reports and manuscripts and confirmed the findings. An analysis of the participants' demographic characteristics showed that the participants' mean age was 32.78 ± 1.88 years, and their average duration of marriage was 7.21 years. The participants had different levels of education from bachelor's to Ph.D. degrees in different fields and were mostly employed.

Results
This study aimed to find out the reasons why a young man might get married on time. To this end, the factors underlying on-time marriages were classified into 3 main themes, 8 organizing secondary themes, and 57 subthemes as shown in Table 1.

Theme 1: Having a family that supports marriage
Analysis of the participants' statement showed that boys' marriage was a priority for supporting families and they tried to provide facilities as much as possible for their children so that they can get married. This theme was categorized into two subthemes of having a supporting

Table 1. The main and secondary themes and subthemes identified in the data

Main themes	Secondary themes	Subthemes
Having a family that supports marriage	Having a supporting family	Close family relationships, positive family emotions and expressing them for marriage, parents' concerning about marriage, having a sister facilitating marriage, the need to discuss marriage with parents, the vital role of the mother in motivating their children for marriage, good treatment of families in the first meeting, not being strict with the spouse's family, having a spouse with a supporting family
	Having basic facilities	Meeting basic requirements and facilities for marriage
A marriage loving character	A marriage loving character	Having no purpose in single life, having a plan for marriage, feeling the need for a person with similar ideas about marriage, having psychological similarities with people, having an early marriage schema, interest in marriage, becoming independent through getting married, belonging to a family, the occurrence of an inner revolution in the individual
	The central role of the man in marriage	Belief in self-efficacy, the active role of the individual and family in marriage, the central role of the man in selecting a spouse, trying to build a utopia
The conditions facilitating marriage	Having a rational view of marriage	Feeling the need to enter a new stage of life, having a reason and belief for marriage, having a rational view, explaining the challenges of marriage, having a metacognitive view of marriage, establishing a balance between emotion and logic, rationality prevailing over being emotional, talking logically to the family about marriage
	Self-efficacy in managing marriage conditions	The man's ability to manage affairs and not allow parents to interfere, the man believing that self-efficacy can solve his wife's communication problems over time, the man's self-efficacy, planning conditions and setting tasks for ceremonies, managing marriage expenses, proving marriage qualifications to the wife and her family
	Having friends interested in marriage	Having friends interested in marriage, watching friends getting married, having friends supporting and facilitating marriage
	Having the right criteria for selecting the spouse	Having a successful model for marriage, believing in the necessity of flexibility in life, having suitable criteria, defining expectations by drawing a life chart, giving importance to personal interests in selecting a spouse, believing in the alignment of couples' view on marriage success, marriage with the right person, believing in the necessity of having the same socioeconomic status, having similar ideas, contentment of the spouse, having reasonable expectations, honesty, the necessity of beliefs in choosing a spouse, giving importance to education, being sociable, reaching maturity, the importance of having similar attitudes in life

family and having basic facilities.

The main focus of a supporting family was on the children's marriage, implicitly highlighting that the closeness of family ties plays a significant role in the marriage of people with supporting families. These families encouraged their children and provide facilities for them to get married on time. One of the participants stated, "*We live in a family where our family relationship is very close and I discussed the matter with my parents and asked them to consider a special case for me so that I could get married*" (Participant 12). Furthermore, the supporting families were concerned about their children's marriages and were trying to remove obstacles to their children's marriages: "*I knew my parents were worried about me. For example, my father said he would not sleep all the night, and they were worried about my condition*" (Participant 3). Having basic facilities was another subtheme that showed that the family could help their children get married. This subtheme covered the two subthemes of providing the basic conditions for marriage and having basic facilities. One of the participants stated, "*I felt that I had the basic conditions for marriage and that the age conditions required that I did not want to be single anymore. Besides, I did not want to have a great age disparity with my child and it was important for me to have the time, patience, and energy to raise a child*" (Participant 12).

Theme 2: A marriage loving character

An analysis of the participants' statements indicated that some men cared more about marriage and family life than about celibacy and personal development. This theme was divided into two subthemes of the marriage loving character and the central role of the man trying to marry. A loving character was an organizing category that showed that some men had a strong desire to start a family and had a plan for marriage: "*Ever since I decided to get married, and before that, I always told my mom that I would eventually get married at the age of 22, and that was my plan at university*" (Participant 14). One of the themes mentioned by the participants in the interviews was their desire to become independent and to find a partner with the same ideas to start a marital life. According to the participants, some families had fostered such traits in their children and made them care about these issues. One of the participants stated, "*If I were to talk about my experience of marriage, I have to tell you that I was very interested in work, effort, and independence almost from middle school onwards. At the same time, I wanted to preserve the dignity of the family, and they did not oppose this issue, saying that work is the essence of man. I was very interested in this issue and as I grew up I found that having independence was very important for me and thus I decided to get married. According to Arastu* [an actor in a

popular Iranian TV series], *I was very interested in getting married*" (Participant 9). Another related subtheme was the central role of the man in making efforts to get married. Some of the participants stated that they made their best to start their marital life and thus they tackled all the obstacles that they had faced in life. These people have played an active role in the marriage process and choosing a spouse. One of the participants stated, "*I was not thinking about a special person for marriage, but myself and the family condition were the main motivation for my marriage. I wanted to have independence and the good atmosphere I experienced in my family made me want to get married*" (Participant 8). "*I chose my wife at university. She was my classmate and I got married at the age of 23*" (Participant 14).

Theme 3: The conditions facilitating marriage

The third main theme identified in this study was the conditions facilitating marriage. This theme was subdivided into subthemes of having a rational view of marriage, self-efficacy in managing marriage conditions, having friends interested in marriage, and having the right criteria for selecting the spouse. According to the participants, having a rational view of marriage helped them to focus on the challenges associated with it so that they could make the best choice in this challenging situation. The participants' focus on analyzing challenges associated with marriages showed the important role of premarital counseling, which can help young people to get to know each other and get familiar: "*I talked to a few friends who were studying in the field of counseling, and they explained to me the challenges of different situations and the advantages and disadvantages of marrying a person from the immediate family or a stranger. In general, they explained to me the common differences between the two*" (Participant 12). Furthermore, the participants' emphasis on establishing a balance between emotions and rationality and the dominance of rationality over emotionality pointed to the importance of rational and logical decisions in successful marriages. Thus, many participants emphasized that it is important to have some predetermined criteria when selecting a partner and care should be taken that emotions do not overwhelm their rationality in the selection and marriage process: "*My wife and I got to know each other at work, and there was more intimacy and rationality involved than emotions. We were in touch for a rather long time before marriage so that we could either confirm or reject our worries and presumptions*" (Participant 7). Self-efficacy in managing the marriage situation was another theme pointed out by the participants. It implied that these men had abilities and characteristics that enable them to cope well with the conditions they encountered in marriage. An exploration of the participants' experiences indicated

that they had plans for all stages of the marriage with full knowledge and managed the expenses of all the wedding ceremonies. "*Because my personality was such that I did not allow anyone to interfere in my life, and my parents never dared to interfere in my personal affairs, even right now*" (Participant 1). "*The first thing we did with my wife was deciding on how to hold our wedding ceremony and its details. Anyway, a ceremony can be held as you wish. The first thing we did was to set a limit for our expenses including the price of the wedding rings, watches, the number of the guests attending the ceremony, the foods to be served, the place of holding the ceremony, etc. We talked about all this and came to an agreement*" (Participant 11). Having friends interested in marriage was the third subtheme pointed out by the participants. Some participants stated that their friends played a supportive role and they used their experiences in helping others to get married. Thus, knowing their friends' experiences of marriage and its challenges played a facilitating role in the marriage process: "*When I talked to my friends they congratulated and supported me*" (Participant 4). "*My closest friends encouraged me a lot, and the fact is that before sharing it with my family, I talked to my friends, and they strongly supported and guided me a lot because they had married before*" (Participant 5).

Having the right criteria for selecting the spouse was the fourth subtheme related to the marriage conditions. Some of the participants stated that they had set some criteria for choosing their spouse, which had an impact on their success in marriage. Some of these criteria were having the same socioeconomic status, having similar ideas, contentment in marital life, having reasonable expectations, honesty, giving importance to education, being sociable, maturity, and having similar attitudes in life. "*The important thing is that both of you look at life the same way, then you can have a successful life*" (Participant 6). "*It's important to examine the attitudes of a person whom you are going to marry: Whether she wants everything to be ready or whether she believes that we should build a life together, fail together, eat together, and run together. The truth is, if you choose the first option, then we should say that the game is over, and if you prefer the second attitude, we will continue, and you should prove it to me. Manage your money, cut down on unnecessary expenses, and tell me 6 months later*" (Participant 9).

Discussion

The present study focused on identifying the causes of successful marriages among Iranian young men. It sought to develop a model for successful marriages among married men and provide more comprehensive results. A qualitative analysis of the participants' statements revealed three main themes (having a family that supports marriage, a marriage loving character, and the conditions

facilitating marriage) as components of the model of successful marriages in married men.

The importance of marriage is not hidden from anyone currently, but unfortunately, in recent years this issue has been considered as one of the social problems (21). One of the major challenges facing young people in Iranian society is increasing the age of marriage for young people, and the key solution is on-time marriage with the help of parents and family members. According to the findings of this study, people with a family supporting marriage stated that their families looked at their sons' lives as a continuous process, and therefore they paid attention to the issue of their marriage during their development. It should be noted, however, that these families, because of their circumstances, fostered traits in their children that were necessary for marriage and viewed marriage as a continuous event that will occur at different times, and before that, they needed direct or indirect training or special planning to find a suitable case or to pave the way for their children's marriage. In fact, analysis of the participants' interviews showed that boys' marriages were a priority for their families and that the families created the conditions to facilitate their children's marriage as much as possible. Besides, marriage at the right age was a priority for a supporting family. These people easily communicated with their own family and had good relationships with their parents and other family members. They also received assistance from family members that facilitated their marriage. It was also shown that the family circumstances and facilities helped people to get married more easily. These people could manage the situation and had the necessary planning for life. Similarly, Boykin (14), Sahebdel et al (16) and Karimi Sani et al (17) have highlighted the important and influential role of the family in marriage. The family was able to persuade its children to marry at the right age and time and facilitated the required conditions. However, these people themselves had the necessary abilities to get married on time under the influence of the family that played a very important role. Family members acted as facilitators and helped the person to discuss the choice of the spouse with the family. Men were able to easily talk about marriage with their parents, and the family adopted a good approach to it and encouraged them to get married. In these families, the parents had a constructive and good relationship with their children and they also provided enough support to enable them to make the necessary preparations for the wedding ceremony. Furthermore, the wife and her family members played a supporting role and tried to have reasonable demands in line with reasonable expectations fitting the material possibilities. They tried to avoid unreasonable demands, and even they helped the couple to hold their wedding ceremony and begin their marital life through their financial aids.

The second main theme identified in this study was a marriage loving character. The participants with this personality trait cared more about marriage and marital life than about celibacy and personal development. Indeed, marriage was a priority for them and they felt the urgent need to get married. These men also had a personality that was effective in marriage, and their interactions with others could attract the wife and they had a great desire to get married. Another factor that facilitated marriage was having friends who supported marriage. These people played a supporting role and helped others to start their marital life. The third subtheme under the category of a marriage loving personality was the effective role of individuals themselves in starting their marital life despite all the problems they could have faced in life. These people themselves chose their spouse and after getting familiar with her, they tried to start their own life. This type of self-efficacy could be attributed to the positive personality traits of these people. This finding was in line with the results of previous studies (12,17).

The third main theme identified in this study was related to the conditions facilitating marriage. The married people in this study stated that they had tried to pave the way for their marital lives or had personality traits that helped them get married at the right time. Personal circumstances and characteristics also indirectly make people ready for marriage. Having a rational view of marriage meant that these men sought to identify and resolve the challenges associated with the selection of the right person and to have a successful married life in the future. Another subtheme under this category was having self-efficacy in managing the marriage situation. The evidence in this study showed that some had abilities and characteristics that enabled them to cope well with the conditions they encountered in their marriage. Moreover, these men had the personality interested in marriage and they played a leading role in choosing a partner. Thus, they had a great desire to begin a marital life, which has forced them to provide facilities along with their effective mate selection behavior. Finally, the final subtheme was having the right criteria for choosing a spouse. The participants stated that they had the right criteria for choosing their spouse, and this contributed to their success in marriage.

The results of this study concerning having a rational view of marriage and self-efficacy in managing marriage conditions were consistent with previous reports in the literature (7,11-13). The evidence from the interviews with the married men in this study indicated that they played an important role in analyzing the challenges of marriage, fostering the ability to manage affairs, self-efficacy, planning and scheduling tasks for the ceremony, and managing the costs of marriage. These people had effective personality traits that helped them make the

best decisions from selecting a spouse to the wedding ceremony and afterward. This group of people emphasized rationality and rational judgment and believed that relying on rationality and analyzing the challenges of marriage and planning were necessary for a successful marriage. These individuals had effective attitudes and rational criteria for choosing a partner including flexibility, giving importance to personal interests in marital life, marrying the right person, having the same socioeconomic status, having similar ideas, the contentment of the partner, having reasonable expectations, honesty, being sociable, having maturity, and the importance of shared attitudes toward life and these characteristics contributed to their success in marriage. In fact, successful mate selection and paving the way for on-time marriage requires that the person examine his characteristics and all the aspects that can influence the decision for marriage and married life and take actions with knowledge and correct information and try to gain necessary skills. Going through this process and taking steps for a successful marriage requires self-knowledge, self-efficacy, and a positive attitude towards such a process, helping the person make the best possible decision in the face of existing problems and thus leading to an on-time marriage.

One of the contributions of the present study was that having a family to support marriage and a marriage loving personality were two important factors that could contribute to successful and on-time marriages. It was also shown that these families and people considered marriage a very important issue. The results of the interviews with the married men showed that they highlighted issues that can be incorporated into an integrated model that accounts for the three dimensions including a marriage loving personality, having a that supports marriage, and conditions facilitating marriage.

One of the limitations of the present study was that the research sample was restricted to married men living in Bushehr. Thus, future studies can focus on other groups of married men with successful marriages. Moreover, family and marriage consultants and the authorities in charge of youth affairs are suggested to prepare and present educational packages for young people who are about to get married using the model developed in this study.

Conclusion

The results of the present study showed that a successful marriage depends on personality requirements and family supporting the on-time marriage which can be useful in developing a comprehensive model. These findings can serve as a valuable guide for young people who are about to get married and can also help people make informed choices and reduce the divorce rate in the society.

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