

What virtues make a marriage happy?

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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims at finding out what virtues make up a happy marriage. Virtues refer to the higher qualities in an individual that make the journey of life dignified and worthwhile. In the context of marriage, virtues help in beautifying the journey of a marriage. In the absence of virtues, marriage becomes a rocky path which is difficult to travel, while virtues help in weeding those rocks. Therefore this paper aims to highlight the virtues that matter the most in a marriage, in the Indian context. For the purpose married individuals between the age group 25-40 were given a list of personal qualities which they rated in the order of their preference. 1 indicated the lowest preference while 10 the highest. They were also asked to add any virtues if they wished to and rate them. This helped us in gaining insight as to what virtues make up highest in the list while which ones are not that important, thus enabling couples to adopt the useful virtues, practice them and inculcate them in their relationships

Keywords: Marital satisfaction, marital virtues, marriage

Introduction

Marriage is like choosing a co-partner for the rest of the journey of life. This is precisely why selection of partner is given so much importance in every culture. Marriage is a lifelong commitment which is of immense importance in every society. Though forms of marriage, types of marriage, and its structure may vary across societies, but what remains common is the complementary and interdependent nature of a relationship wherein, two individuals commit to spend their life together. Married love is a unique form of love between a man and woman which has a special benefit for the society. This benefit means continuation of species through reproduction and a well-established institution of family. However, looking at the rising divorce rates and mushrooming of live in relationship it is reasonable to take steps in the direction which strengthen the foundation of this tested institution.

Satisfaction, in simple terms refers to the sense of contentment which we experience out of any stimulus. Therefore, in layman's language, marital satisfaction can be described as the contentment or fulfilment that one experiences in the course of her or his marriage. It is well known that satisfaction is subjective and cannot be very easily described. However, social psychologists refer to a combination of marital quality and marital happiness, together as a measure of marital satisfaction. Roach.*et al* (1981) defined marital satisfaction as one's subjective evaluation of favourability towards her/his spouse and the marital relationship. This indicates that for one to be satisfied in marriage, it is essential to have a positive outlook of partner and the relationship. Although the road is to be travelled by oneself, it is greatly facilitated or hampered by the one walking beside you.

Therefore this paper aims to find out the virtues that are most preferred so that the journey becomes light and easy. Fowers (1998, 2000, 2001), the pioneer of marital virtues stated that virtues are the key factors that contribute to a satisfied marriage. In his book 'Beyond The Myth of Marital Happiness' he focused on the role of various factors such as generosity, friendship, loyalty, courage etc. on marital satisfaction. These factors, according to him, are the deepest ideals that we should try and pursue in our marriage. He defines virtues as "the personal qualities or character strength that make it possible for persons to live a good or worthwhile life". This concept was later operationalized by Hawkins, Blanchard, Fawcett, and Jenkins (2007). Just like virtues are essential for a balanced life, marital virtues are essential for marital contentment. For without virtues, a marriage would simply exist as a functional relation between two needful individuals. And marriage definitely is more than just that!

Therefore a lot of work on marital relationships has been happening in social psychology and other related fields like sociology, anthropology etc. Taking the ritual forward, this paper attempts to find out the virtues that matter in the Indian context.

However this paper is an exploratory attempt to find out what virtues fit in the Indian context. India has lower divorce rates as compared to most other countries. There can be various reasons that can be attributed to this factor like culture, compliance, importance given to perseverance and a lot more. Even then what is surprising is the rising number of live-in couples in the society. Live-in for now seems to be a band aid solution to a chronic problem, which is the underlying fear in the youth of having to live with someone throughout their lives, regardless of the quality that relationship may be going through. To

overcome this they decide to give up on committing which may soothe them temporarily but brings out problems that they never thought of. The most important one being that of lack of security which is taken care of in a marriage. Therefore this paper aims to find out those virtues which can make a marriage blissful.

PURPOSE:

To find out the most important virtues in marriage that are responsible for marital satisfaction among married couples.

Method

Participants:

The research consisted of a sample of 30 married individuals between the age group of 25-40 living in the Jaipur city. Purposive sampling technique was used for data collection.

Instrument:

Sample was provided with a checklist consisting of 20 virtues, which they had to score in the order of their preference. A score of 10 indicated that the virtue was highly valued while that of zero indicated that it was not in their list of preference. The scores were then compiled to find their means and then given ranking on the basis of their preference.

Result

The current study was an exploratory research, aimed to find out what virtues are important for couples for marital satisfaction in the Indian context. The virtues described ahead describe an overview of what matters most going down to what can be adjusted.

Table 1 consists of the mean score of each virtue.(from highest to lowest)

Rank	Virtue	Mean
1.	Love	8.85
2.	Support	8.75
3.	Trust	8.4
4.	Care	8.35
5.	Respect	8.3
6.	Honesty	8.25
7.	Friendliness	8.1
8.	Cheerfulness	7.75
9.	Kindness	7.5
10.	Maturity	7.45
11.	Courage	7.35
12.	Humour	7.25
13.	Humility	7.2
14.	Gratitude	7.1
15.	Forgiveness	6.95
16.	Affection	6.8
17.	Easy-going	6.75
18.	Intelligence	6.65
19.	Religiosity	6.1
20.	Other orientation	5.47

As we can see from the table, love stands as the most important factor for married couples. Other factors that are important are support, Trust, Care, Respect, Honesty, and Friendliness. Factors that are not considered very important are other orientation, religiosity, intelligence. Rest of the factors are moderately important.

Discussion:

The purpose of this research was to explore the virtues, in order of their preference which facilitate marital satisfaction in the Indian context. The concept of marital virtues is relatively new in psychology and it requires a great deal of research especially intercultural, because the nature of virtues that may apply to western or individualistic society may not be equally appropriate for a collectivistic and orientalist country like India. The virtues framework provided by Fowers (2000) is beautifully constructed but it was important to find out if it fits equally in India. The research was only exploratory in order to gain a fair understanding of the virtues framework. Let us glance through an overview of what results revealed.

It may be mentioned here that those virtues rated highest are of utmost importance and somewhat universal, that is to say that these cannot be done without and are applicable to most marriages without fail. The virtues that have been rated on the moderate level are complementary and although can be done without, but definitely add a beautiful charm to an individual's personality and also the relationship. Lastly the virtues that are scored the lowest are not unimportant per se, but vary in degree for individuals, which is to say that they may be of extreme importance to one, while not that important to the other, depending on a person's previous experiences and current situation. Therefore they are not the least important; rather they hold a subjective value for all. Let us have a look at the virtues.

High

Love: The concept of love in India not only has a physical dimension but more of a spiritual dimension. The idea of love marriage is still not accepted in smaller towns however there is a concept of universal love which is propagated by various philosophers and saints since ages. The importance given to love is also evident in the research where it came out as the most important virtue in marriage in India. And rightly so. We cannot imagine any relationship to exist without love and if it does, there won't be satisfaction in it. Therefore love rightly stands as the number one virtue.

Support: In a collectivistic culture like India, interdependence is the key. More so because the roles of husband and wife are merging and neither is the husband the sole bread winner and nor the wife the sole care taker. In such a situation support becomes a virtue of irreplaceable importance. Be it when family members make unreasonable demand or when there is extreme pressure on one or both the partners, support comes to rescue.

Trust: The role of trust need not be explained. Be it something as small as sharing a secret, or as big as trusting with children and family, trust is something that forms the foundation. Ross (2009) found that a relationship where partners can depend on each other, accept and believe each other's words, go a long way. Vlaar, Van den Bosch & Volberda (2007) explained that Trust encompasses not only the belief in the ability of a partner organization to accomplish a task but also the belief in the goodwill or positive intentions of this partner and the perception that it adheres to acceptable values. This suggests that trust largely determines relationship longevity and satisfaction.

Care: Care goes a long way in marriage. Sometimes there maybe reasons for a partner to not fully feel love or be able to trust or support the other, but care is something that holds value even at such times. Remembering to keep the partner's clothes ready or giving them the needed medicine, even if they are not in talking terms is an important sign that holds a high significance. In fact it may at times help resolve even the most trivial issues with ease if there is a genuine level of the same.

Respect: Respect never goes out of fashion. And it not only involves a sense of respect for the partner, but a level of it for the family of the partner and their closed ones too. Even during the worst of fights a partner should remember to respect the fact that they are two separate individuals and respect is one thing that they thoroughly deserve. It is also important to remember that respect is not gained but earned. Although there may be compliance but true respect stands out and is also reciprocal in nature, that is if you give it, you are sure to get it. Also respect means identifying the other as a full individual rather than an object for satisfying needs, thus preventing extreme cases of violence in a relationship.

Honesty: When trust is important, can honesty be far behind? Honesty is not just about stating the truth, but a higher level of integrity to be what you are. It is important to note here that honesty should also be accompanied by the above mentioned virtues or it may lead to very drastic consequences for any relationship. Being honest about having no virtue is although far better than being hypocrite about possessing one, but it will not go a long way. Also it is important for the partner to be accepting, empathetic, non-judgmental and strong in a relationship in order to let the culture of honesty prevail.

Friendliness: Love is friendship, friendship is love. Romantic inclination alone cannot be of great help unless there is an element of friendship, which involves sharing, hanging out together, understanding each other and giving space when needed. Friendliness also involves being able get over fights and arguments and other gestures like listening to each other when needed, helping in times of need, being there in tough times etc.

Moderate

Cheerfulness: Although not essential but definitely important is the characteristic of cheerfulness. It not only increases interpersonal attraction, but also helps in maintaining a positive vibe in the relationship. A person with a cheerful disposition will definitely be able to make even the most difficult situation lighter. It also makes room for more experimentation and openness to change and reduces nagging and complaining behaviour thus making way for a smoother journey.

Kindness: An act of kindness never goes unnoticed. It is a virtue which will put the partner in a much more positive light thus helping increase attraction. Kindness indicates a soft core and although too much of it can sometimes be misused but even then the act remains important in itself. A kind soul will refrain from extreme harshness and also will have other characteristics like helping nature, positive outlook etc.

Maturity: Maturity maybe defined in various ways. Stephen.R. Covey (1989) rightly defines it as courage with consideration. Someone who is immature may have a large level of one of these. However, a balance of the two rightly defines maturity. A mature individual will know how to handle most of the situations without over or under doing it, whereas someone immature would either under react or overreact causing much damage.

Courage: Courage is defined as the ability to fight for what you believe. It is a rare virtue which makes an individual stand for what is right. It is also important in the sense that people may sometime mistake rowdiness for courage. While rowdiness is unnecessary form of rebellion, courage is a virtue that helps one to stand principally and non-discriminatingly for what one truly believes in. It is important in marriage because many times partners need to make decisions which may not be easy but are necessary. For e.g. to adopt a child when repeated failed attempts of making the wife conceive, which might be harmful for the wife's health will require a great deal of courage, which if the couple is not able to, might lead to many negative consequences for the wife's health as well as their marriage.

Humour: We all know that laughter is the best medicine. It is also a well-established fact that a person with a good sense of humour and wit becomes multiple times more attractive than his/her unfunny counterpart. Also humour can compensate even for many other shortcomings in a relationship. A joke cracked in an intense situation may help in making the situation lighter and may prevent a couple from making mountain of a molehill.

Humility: A humble individual will usually not let ego come in the way of relationship. Also if a partner is modest, then it is easier for him/her to find satisfaction as it is usually arrogance that calls for the need for change in the other.

Gratitude: Gratitude doesn't seem to find its right place in this study. The reason behind this could be that it hasn't been experimented much with. Gratitude can change the entire perspective of a situation from worse to best. It has immense benefits but its benefits are probably unrealised because it hasn't been practised in real life situation as much as it should be.

Low

Forgiveness: As mentioned in the beginning of the discussion, many variables have immense situational value but they may not seem that important otherwise. Forgiveness is one such variable. If there is a situation where partners are about to give up on their relationship, practicing forgiveness maybe of great help. This is because, being human we are all experimenting in life and some experiments may prove wrong. To err is to human, to forgive divine. Therefore forgiveness is a virtue whose severe need may not arise frequently, but when it does, it goes a long way.

Affection: As much as love is admired in the Indian society, affection is dismayed. The culture of expressing love isn't one which is encouraged much especially to a romantic partner. It is in fact in many places taken as offence if one partner shows even a minute sign of affection towards the spouse. Therefore due to the prevalence of such culture, affection is rated low.

Easy going: It is a trait that makes living simpler. For some, even the biggest of matters pass easily while others make mountains out of molehill. The tendency of easy-goingness is one where an individual is able to easily get along with things big and small. Although it is good to be easy going as it leads to lesser fussiness and nagging, but at the same time easy-goingness is also related with laid back attitude and laziness and lack of concern for the other which is why it has been rated low.

Intelligence: In collectivistic societies, especially in India, intellectual intelligence is not as valued as social and emotional intelligence is. Sibiya, Misra&Shrivastava (2004) found that Indian culture attaches greater importance to altruistic tendencies. Lavalekar, Kulkarni and Jagtap (2010) found that emotional intelligence is related to marital satisfaction, indicating that this kind of intelligence is highly favoured in our culture. However Lewak et al, (1985) found that there was a slight trend that higher intelligence in females was related to higher marital satisfaction; however no clear relationship between marital satisfaction and intelligence was found.

Religiosity: With polarising trend in religiosity, its rank being so low indicates a good sign. There could be various reasons behind religiosity being ranked low, one of them being the filter that is attached to selecting partners. A partner from another religion is so categorically discouraged that individuals tend to not look for

partners from another religion. Secondly even if this happens, it most likely happens to be a love marriage, where partner do not report religiosity as being a reason for discord. Therefore religiosity does not come in the way and thus rated low.

Other orientation: other orientation refers to the ability to think of others before your own self. It is a higher virtue that if present in an individual is of immense important in building one's character. However, it does not appear to be such an important virtue in marital relations as we can see that it has been rated very low by the sample.

Findings of the study

- Love was the most important factor for marital satisfaction for couples, followed by support, trust care, Respect, Honesty, and Friendliness.
- Of moderate importance were virtues of Cheerfulness, Kindness, Maturity, Courage, Humour, Humility, and Gratitude.
- Virtue of other orientation did not seem to be very important for marital satisfaction along with other virtues like religiosity, easy going, Forgiveness, Affection and intelligence.

Conclusion

The virtues of character like love, support etc. hold maximum importance for Indian couples while personality dispositions like humour, cheerfulness etc. are moderate indicating that they are complementary. Of least importance were situational virtues like forgiveness, affection etc. Culture and past experiences played an important role in rating the virtues.

Limitations

- Sample size was small.
- The participants were from Jaipur city and had education at least up till graduation, thus less representative.
- Some virtues in the checklist were unambiguous.

Future suggestions:

- A study comparing data of couples living in together shall be of great help in understanding the gap that is encouraging youngsters to opt for living in.
- Also a study on larger sample will help prepare a framework on marital virtues in the Indian context.

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