

ROLE OF INFERTILITY IN DETERMINING COUPLES' MARITAL SATISFACTION AND LOCUS OF CONTROL

SHEHLA A. YASIN, MAKIYA ASLAM

Lahore College for Women University

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE

To explore how marital satisfaction and locus of control of infertile couples is different in terms of gender differences and type of infertility i.e. primary and secondary infertility.

STUDY DESIGN

Comparative exploratory study

PLACE AND DURATION OF STUDY

The study was conducted at Gynecological indoor and outdoor units of different hospitals and infertility clinics of Lahore during the year 2013.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

By using Purposive sampling technique we selected 60 infertile couples (N=120). We equally subdivided the sample in three groups: never conceived, gone through one miscarriage, and those who had a history of frequent miscarriages. Data were collected using Couple's satisfaction index and Levenson's locus of control questionnaire.

RESULTS

Results indicated significant gender differences in locus of control. Whereas marital satisfaction varied significantly on the basis of age, duration after miscarriage, education, number of miscarriages, duration of marriage and internal locus of control. Gender and family type exerted non-significant effect on marital satisfaction and external locus of control (Chance) of infertile couples.

CONCLUSION

Infertility is one such issue which exerts drastic effects on couples' personal relations, marital satisfaction and many others facets of their life. The results indicated that higher level of internal locus of control tend to be related with higher marital satisfaction whereas higher external locus of control is inversely related with marital satisfaction. Psycho therapists and marital counselors can benefit from this study.

KEY WORDS

Locus of control, Marital satisfaction, Infertility.

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of time "Be fruitful and multiply" is a permanent and unshakable command for most of the societies¹, same is true for Pakistan where it is essential to have a child after marriage and it is cultivated so deeply in the minds of people that it becomes the strongest natural desire in marrying couple as well. Infertility is considered as a major crisis not only by infertile couples but also for significant others around them².

Usually infertility is inability to conceive despite regular unprotected intercourse for one year^{3,4}. Infertility is further defined as inability to carry a live birth after conception⁵. One out of every six couple is facing infertility⁴. World health organization found one hundred and eighty seven million couples around the world (47 nations excluding) are suffering from infertility and primary infertility is found in 18 million⁶.

In Pakistani society infertile women began to feel loss of attraction, low self-esteem, threats of separation or remarriage of her spouse which drives them towards depression and other psychological issues⁷. It is also observed that men too face different negative effects of infertility as infertility is claimed to be a stigmatizing situation by the sufferers⁸.

Researches were conducted to examine the existence of locus of control among infertile couples and many of them concluded that infertile people themselves are perceived to be externally controlled⁹. Researchers also reflected the fact that people who had the locus of internal control, used the better coping value to solve their marital problems and had high satisfaction¹⁰.

Infertility is couple's problem rather than individual's problem which gives way to multiple stresses that adversely affects marital satisfaction¹¹. Marital satisfaction refers to the level of favorability (either higher or lower) towards the marital relationship and one's spouse¹². The term marital satisfaction is usually used to describe behavior of an individual towards his/her spouse and relationship. Research highlights that infertility, most of the time, negatively affects couples' relationship.

This study was designed to explore role of gender, education and type of family in producing differences in locus of control (LOC) and marital satisfaction in three types of infertile couples (who have never conceived or had one miscarriage or experiencing more than one miscarriages). It was hypothesized that infertile females would have higher locus of external control and males would have higher locus of internal control. It was postulated that joint family system would positively affect marital satisfaction and internal locus of control in infertile couples. Couples with multiple miscarriages and never conceived will score more on external locus of control (powerful others and Chance) than couples having single miscarriage. Older couples will score less on external locus of control and would have lower marital satisfaction. Education will affect internal locus of control.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

Participants

A sample of 60 infertile couples (N=120) with age range of 20 to 54 years and education matric to post graduate was purposively selected from indoor and outdoor units of different hospitals and infertility clinics of Lahore. Marriage duration of couples ranged from 2 to 20 years. Sample was divided into three types of infertility; the couples who never conceived, who had one miscarriage and who had frequent miscarriages.

Instruments

Levenson's Locus of Control Scale.

It is a 24 items scale developed to measure three factors; internal locus of control (ILOC), powerful others (PWO) and chance. A person can score minimum 0 and maximum 48 scores on this scale. It is possible for a person to have higher scores on both dimensions of LOC.

Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI).

It is a 32 items scale. Its score ranges from 0-161 and 104.5 is cut off score which indicates satisfactory relationship. The higher the scores the greater is marital satisfaction¹³.

Procedure

Data was collected from all participants individually and researcher was present at the place of data collection. Participants were selected purposively keeping in view their educational and socio economic level and family type. After taking permission from authorities informed consent was taken and participants were assured for anonymity and confidentiality. After data collection SPSS was used to compute statistical analyses.

RESULTS

Independent sample t test was used to measure gender differences in types of LOC. Men and women were found to be significantly different in terms of external locus of control (specifically powerful others) and internal locus of control. Mean values indicated higher scores on Powerful others (PWO) in women and higher scores on internal locus of control (ILOC) in men. Non-significant gender differences were found on marital satisfaction.

Table 1

Independent Sample t-test measuring gender differences in external and internal locus of control and marital satisfaction

Variable	Men		Women		t (df)	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Chance	36.92	13.24	39.20	10.71	1.031(118)	.305
PWO	28.28	11.32	35.86	11.34	3.664 (118)	.000
ILOC	35.16	7.86	29.26	11.16	-3.336 (118)	.001
Total	107.00	24.11	100.70	29.20	-1.289 (118)	.200

Second hypothesis was about family type and locus of control. Results revealed non-significant difference between couples which indicated that family types did not affect locus of control or marital satisfaction of infertile individuals.

The 'never conceived group' was compared with 'one miscarriage and multiple miscarriages groups' through one way ANOVA. Results indicated significant differences in three types of infertile individuals $F(2, 117) = 3.10, p < .05$. Tukey's HSD further revealed external LOC was significantly lower in individuals with no miscarriage than one miscarriage ($M=34.42, SD=8.42$) and more than one miscarriage ($M=33.45, SD=13.01$).

Differences as per educational status of infertile individuals regarding internal locus of control was measured through one way ANOVA. Results indicated significant differences in ILOC on the basis of education $F(2, 117) = 11.00, p < .01$. Post Hoc comparisons indicated higher ILOC in individuals with post graduate level of education ($M=37.82, SD=6.19$).

When finding out the relationship between marital satisfaction, age and locus of control, marital satisfaction was significantly and positively related with internal locus of control in infertile couples $r(120) = .318, p < .01$. Non-significant inverse relationship was found between age and marital satisfaction whereas inverse significant relationship was found between powerful others and age i.e. $r(120) = -.227, p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

Infertile men and women tend to be significantly different in locus of control. Men scored significantly higher on internal locus of control whereas women scored significantly higher on external LOC. This is in line with previous research¹⁴ which highlighted higher internal LOC of men with lower level of self-blame and shame and vice versa. The result is also in line with studies of gender differences in LOC¹⁵.

No gender differences were found on marital satisfaction. Researchers supported no significant gender differences on marital satisfaction¹⁶. Interestingly research indicated improved and quality partnership levels because of infertility¹⁷.

Infertile couples were assessed on family type regarding LOC and marital satisfaction, results revealed non-significant effect of family type on marital satisfaction and LOC. This finding is contradictory with research findings¹⁸ which found significant difference in locus of control and marital adjustment with respect to family system. One justification for these contradictory results may be the variance in sample, above mentioned study included working women only while we took infertile couples.

Our attempt to analyze external locus of control (ELOC) in three conditions of infertility yielded significant differences. The group who never conceived scored significantly lower on ELOC than other groups. Thus the results indicated that couples with one and multiple miscarriages considered their lives to be controlled by powerful individuals and fate. In our society this result might be an indication of religious beliefs i.e. our belief in Allah and good or bad fate or may be the result of past sins. It is in line with a previous study¹⁹ that revealed that infertile couples had to face rejection from social circles and they considered infertility as a result of their past sins or ill fate.

Education seemed to play its role in internal locus of control (ILOC). Highly educated individuals (post graduate and above) seemed to have significantly higher ILOC as compared with graduated and

lesser education than graduation. This result can be attributed to the higher levels of insight about reasons of infertility which highly educated individuals possess. This result is in congruence with previous study²⁰.

Lastly there appeared a significantly positive relationship between internal LOC and marital satisfaction and significantly negative relationship between external LOC and marital satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Our study seemed to highlight an intricate effect of gender differences, education and age on locus of control and marital satisfaction. It indicated that internal locus of control might save men from higher guilt and self-blame and increase distress in women but it need to be evaluated further on these grounds. Moreover, internal LOC is significantly related with enhanced marital satisfaction²¹.


IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The study has implications for psychologists and marital counselors. They can train the couples in use of internal locus of control to enhance marital satisfaction. This study could be more comprehensive if we could include qualitative component as well. Interviews of infertile couples about reasons of infertility could add more meaning to the research.

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Sno.	Author Name	Affiliation	Contribution	Signature
1.	Shehla A. Yasin	Lahore College for Women University	Conceived the idea, supervised research, statistical analysis results and final write up	
2.	Makiya Aslam	Lahore College for Women University	Data collection and write up	