

REVIEW ARTICLE

Marital satisfaction in deaf couples: a review study

Arezoo Abedi¹, Mohammad Rostami¹, Somayeh Abedi², Nasrin Sudmand¹, Guita Movallali^{2*}

¹- Department of Counseling, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran

²- Pediatric Neurorehabilitation Research Center, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran

Received: 18 Mar 2018, Revised: 16 Jun 2018, Accepted: 24 Jun 2018, Published: 15 Oct 2018

Abstract

Background and Aim: One of the most important aspects of marital life is the satisfaction of couples. Marital satisfaction is a positive and enjoyable attitude that the husband and wife have in different aspects of marital relations such as relationships, personality issues, conflict resolution, financial issues, sexual relations, and children. Deafness affects the relationship between couples and may decrease emotional and physical intimacy. Therefore, loss of hearing has negative consequences for marital satisfaction. This study aimed to investigate marital satisfaction in deaf couples.

Recent Findings: A review of studies between 1978 and 2017 has shown that marital satisfaction in couples who are both deaf are higher than couples who one of the couples is deaf.

Conclusion: Studies show that deaf- hearing marriage leads to less life satisfaction than deaf-deaf or hearing hearing marriage. Lack of national studies in this field is obvious. It seems that teaching the couples life skills by can be helpful.

Keywords: Deaf; couple; marital satisfaction

Citation: Abedi A, Rostami M, Abedi S, Sudmand N, Movallali G. Marital satisfaction in deaf couples: a review study. *Aud Vestib Res.* 2018;27(4):179-84.

* **Corresponding author:** Pediatric Neurorehabilitation Research Center, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Daneshjoo Blvd., Evin, Tehran, 1985713834, Iran. Tel: 009821-22180042, E-mail: drmovallali@gmail.com

Introduction

National Association for the Deaf (NAD) defines deaf person as a subject with a hearing that is not enough to relay information [1]. Deafness is a heterogeneous condition that has extensive effects on cognitive, emotional, and social development and leads to weak self-confidence, irritability, isolation, frustration, depression, and anxiety [2,3]. Studies have shown that mental health problems are prevalent among deaf and some researchers have reported their prevalence as high as 40% [4]. Deficit in understanding, perception, and use of language can lead to communication problems that result in frustration and other problems such as aggressive behavior, anxiety and social isolation and also less opportunities for development and language and communication skill such as building relationships with peers [5]. Hearing loss can have potential negative effects on all aspects of life, including marriage. Hearing impairment of one spouse or both can endanger couples' communications. One aspect of couples' life is couples satisfaction in marital relations which includes positive and enjoyable attitude in relationship, personality, conflict resolution, financial situations, sexual relationship, and children. Thus improving their awareness, training and consultation is essential [6].

Deafness affects couples' relationship and can lead to decrement of emotional and physical intimacy, so hearing loss can have negative

effects on marital satisfaction [6,7]. Different studies have shown that several components are involved in marital satisfaction including seeking a companion [6], being good-tempered [8], trustfulness, love and faithfulness [9], intimacy and avoidance of aggressive control [10], interactions and showing interest (love and affection), empathy, sexual satisfaction, cooperation, recognition of emotions, perception of emotions, their origin and appropriate management [11,12]. As marital satisfaction and its components are important, the aim of the present study was to investigate different components of marital satisfaction in deaf couples.

Methods

In this review article, all research articles about marital satisfaction and deafness and hearing loss from 1978 to 2017 were included. Keywords of “marital satisfaction,” “marital,” “pair deaf,” “deaf couple,” “deaf even,” “deaf spouse” and “deaf” were searched in the SID, Springer link, Sage, Elsevier, ProQuest and Google scholar engine motors.

Our review shows that there are only 10 downloadable papers on marital satisfaction of deaf couples. Table 1 summarizes these articles in order of year of publication.

Relationship satisfaction in deaf and hard of hearing couples

Relationship is an integral part of marriage and without it, marriage is endangered. Hearing impairment can endanger relationship and lead to lower emotional and physical intimacy. As relationship is vital for marriage, hearing loss can have deep effects on hearing impaired subject, his or her spouse and their marriage. Accurate understanding and interpretation of behaviors are essential for intimate relationship. Common relationship problems in deaf couples when one or two couples are deaf consisted of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of issues, lack of training or learned skills about managing life issues [6,7].

Morgan [13] conducted a research on relationship satisfaction in deaf couples who were members of hearing impaired and deaf

community. The results show that most participants (70%) reported their satisfaction with their overall relationships and their partners. On the other hand, only 9% of participants had dissatisfaction. In addition, participants with the sense of satisfaction, had reported good compatibility. Morgan [13] argued about the relationship between satisfaction level and type of preferred communication modality in general circumstances. The results indicate that communication modality (and if partner has same preferred communication modality) can affect perceived satisfaction. Nevertheless a lot of subjects had same communication modality with their partners. Most participants use visual-gestural mode of communication or a sign language (97.4% of participants). They conducted analyses for determining the reported relationship satisfactions by deaf people who are members of hearing impaired and deaf community and their participation in deaf community activities. They found no relationship between participation and their relationship satisfaction. There was a weak correlation between deaf community activities and partners' cooperation and relationship satisfaction. Participants who reported their participation in deaf community activities with their spouse had a little higher relationship satisfaction than participants who did not participate with their spouse or did it a few times. This study showed dual implications: couples with higher relationship satisfaction spend more time together and vice versa. Comparing Morgan [13] results with Schumm et al. [14] findings shows that deaf people who are members of hearing impaired and deaf community have the same level of relationship satisfaction as normal hearing couples. These results show that dynamics and relationship factors that affect satisfaction can be the same in normal hearing and deaf subjects but there might be additional factors, too. Morgan described that making relationship in educational systems has a role in couples' interactions. In his study, several issues in relationship satisfaction between deaf couples, deaf who are members of deaf community and subjects with normal hearing were being

Table 1. Summary of studies conducted on marital satisfaction of deaf couples

Author(s)	Published year	Type of study	Sample	Results
Mastrocinque et al. [19]	2015	Qualitative	14 samples	The findings of this study showed that deaf people are exposed to various types of violence. The lack of awareness of intimate partner violence and the lack of access to specialized services were the problems deaf people faced.
Abedi et al. [6]	2016	Single case experimental design	3 deaf women	The results of this study showed that life skills' training improves marital satisfaction in deaf women.
Lehane et al. [16]	2016	Review	-	Twenty-four articles were reviewed in this research. The results showed a relationship between loss of a sense (such as hearing sense) and psychological well-being. Losing one's senses causes the psychological and communicative well-being of a person to be compromised.
Heiman et al. [21]	2015	Descriptive	282 deaf (18 to 64 years old)	In this study, deaf greater number of sexual partners was compared to normal individuals. AIDS prevalence was equal in the normal and deaf population. In this study it was shown the greater risk of sexual health problems in deaf people.
Abedi et al. [7]	2015	Single case experimental design	3 deaf women	Life skills training have increased the score of people in the subscales of marital satisfaction such as personality topics, marital relationship, conflict resolution, and financial management in deaf women.
Morgan [13]	2013	Descriptive	67 participants	Deaf-normal hearing couples experience less compliance with deaf-deaf couples.
Anderson et al. [20]	2011	Review	-	In this study, interpersonal violence is prevalent among the inferior people. One type of violence that is so common in deaf children is sex abuse. An interpersonal violence in adults as a sex offense to deaf women is a victim of their sexual partner.
Johnston-McCabe et al. [18]	2011	Descriptive	46 deaf women	The findings showed that almost three quarters (71.7%) of the deaf were victims of psychological or emotional abuse, and more than half (56.5%) were victims of some physical violence and sexual violence in marital relationships.
McIntosh [15]	2006	Quantitative (correlation)	132 deaf-hearing	In this study, marital satisfaction and conflict styles of hearing-deaf couples were studied. The findings of this study showed that deaf-hearing couples who have conflicting styles, style of cooperation and simple style have higher marital satisfaction.
Yorgason et al. [17]	2003	Qualitative	8 couples, one of whom was hearing.	The results of the research showed that the audiences are more confident in their communication skills than in the audiences. Resilience to the disciplines helped them to adapt to hearing impairment (no sound). Their resilience to stressors caused by deafness can lead to a high level of marital satisfaction.

discussed including overall satisfaction, dissatisfaction, involvement in the deaf community, matches between partners in communication modality, comparison between relationship satisfaction and previous data about relationship satisfaction in normal hearing subjects and other

issues such as education, ethnical and cultural background [13].

One of the aspects of marital satisfaction is the experiences they share, such as mental experience, as well as their intimacy. In every marriage, people encounter negative emotions.

Negative emotional experience in time leads to couple's dissatisfaction. Couples who one of them has normal hearing ability and the other is deaf (normal hearing-deaf couple) have less satisfaction than couples who both have normal hearing ability (normal hearing-normal hearing couple) or both are deaf (deaf-deaf couple). If normal hearing-deaf couples have conflict resolution skills, they will have higher perceived satisfaction. Lack of conflict resolution skills minimizes marital satisfaction and results in divorce in 90% of normal hearing-deaf marriages [15].

Lehane et al. [16] maintained that regardless of disease type or handicap, marital communication is vital for marital satisfaction. All reported papers have shown that losing senses can lead to communication problems, social isolation, increase in dependency, relationship inequity, decrease in marital satisfaction or cognitive problems. Losing each sense is accompanied by communication problems and psychological and social consequences that affect couples' relationship [17]. Abedi et al. studied deaf females and showed that they have low score in regards to marital satisfaction and personality characters, marital relationship, conflict resolution and financial management and after living skill training their score improved significantly [6,7]. Violence is one of the factors that affects marital satisfaction in deaf people. Johnston-McCabe et al. [18] showed that violence rate is high in deaf and three out of four participants (71.7%) reported that they sometimes were victims of emotional misbehaviors and more than half of them (56.5%) were victims of physical violence in their intimate relationship. Being the victim of sexual violence was reported in one out of four (26.1%) participants and one out of three (30.4%) participants reported that they had experienced violence potentially in their life. This violence may be in the form of intimate partner violence and lack of access to specialized services. Sometimes misuse leads to serious physical and psychological impairments [19]. So for presenting specialized services for supporting deaf and victims of home violence should be planned in future [18].

When both spouses are weak in communication skills, the probability of violence and misbehavior will increase because both sides of communication do not have conflict resolution skill. Without conflict resolution skill, it is impossible to have a strong relationship. Anderson et al. showed that the prevalence of force and compulsion in sexual relationship and sexual harassment in deaf is higher than normal hearing couples. Many deaf people have no information about what is accounted as violence and they do not have any alternative strategies for resolving conflicts. This is due to lack of implicit learning, communication with family members and no hygienic training. They use sign language so they have trouble in understanding hygienic cares that need linguistic skills. This results in inequality in sexual health, preventive health, and cardiovascular disease. So the deaf will be isolated and their problems will become more prominent [20].

In addition to violence, deaf couples experience divorce more than normal population. Based on global studies, divorce rate for hearing impaired couples is the same as normal population but in deaf people, it is four times more than normal population [6,7]. Only 25.6% of respondents who were among deaf-normal hearing subjects think about divorce. If deaf-normal hearing subjects know how to communicate with each other, they can have long and successful marriage [18].

Conclusions

This study was conducted to investigate marital satisfaction in deaf couples. As it was mentioned, deaf people have communication difficulties. Communication skills are the main components for marital satisfaction. As other studies have shown [20-22] the deaf couples have personal, educational and psychosocial problems in addition to communication difficulties. Deaf marriage can happen in different combinations such as deaf-deaf or deaf-normal hearing subjects. As studies show deaf-normal hearing marriage leads to less life satisfaction than deaf-deaf or normal hearing-normal hearing marriage.

This study shows that couples who are able to understand their differences have higher life satisfaction. In deaf-normal hearing marriage, the deaf spouse uses sign language and normal hearing subject uses speech. Using different mode of communication make it harder to communicate and results in lack of marital satisfaction. This low marital satisfaction may be the reason for high rate of divorce in deaf couples [6,21].

Hearing impairment does not lead to divorce but its consequences and problems in marital relationship and because of lack of conflict resolution skill training and lack of communication lead to lower life satisfaction and compatibility. So they experience communication problems, social isolation and dependence on others as a result of losing hearing sense and they are exposed to violence, force and sexual misuse. They are unable to improve their skills for being more compatible and resolving conflicts due to their hearing impairment and lack of information sources. If the deaf are trained, they can perform very well. As an example, deaf wives who had low score in marital satisfaction, personality, marital relationship, conflict resolution and financial management and were trained in regards to living skills showed significant improvement in the scores [7,19].

Investigation of previous studies on marital satisfaction reveals important points for improving marital satisfaction in the deaf. For example, training, holding workshops and publishing books can help these couples. Unfortunately there are fewer studies in our country about deaf marital satisfaction and we do not know how much the results from other countries is dependent on culture, language and ethnics. Lack of national studies in this field is obvious. Therefore, this topic must be considered by researchers and health policy makers.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

1. Patel JV. Communicating with deaf people. Risk of ill health is increased. *BMJ*. 2010;341:c5986. doi:

2. Sudmand N, Dadkhah A, Movallali G, Rostami M, Sattari M. [Effectiveness of group life skills training on Anger control of deaf adolescents]. *Journal of Applied Phychological Research*. 2016;7(3):241-52. Persian.
3. Fellingner J, Holzinger D, Pollard R. Mental health of deaf people. *The Lancet*. 2012;379(9820):1037-44. doi: [10.1016/S0140-6736\(11\)61143-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(11)61143-4)
4. Hindley PA, Hill PD, McGuigan S, Kitson N. Psychiatric disorder in deaf and hearing impaired children and young people: a prevalence study. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry*. 1994;35(5):917-34. doi: [10.1111/j.1469-7610.1994.tb02302.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1994.tb02302.x)
5. Edwards L, Crocker S. *Psychological processes in deaf children with complex needs: an evidence-based practical guide*. 1st ed. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers; 2008.
6. Abedi A, Dadkhah A, Rostami M, Soltani PR, Movallali G, Salehy Z. Marital satisfaction of Iranian deaf women: the role of a life skills training program. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Management Studies*. 2016;3(4):234-40. doi: [10.20448/journal.500/2016.3.4/500.4.234.240](https://doi.org/10.20448/journal.500/2016.3.4/500.4.234.240)
7. Abedi A, Movallali G, Rostami M, Reza Soltani P, Dadkhah A. [The effect of a life skills training program component enrich marital satisfaction of Iranian deaf women]. *Applied Psychological Research Quarterly*. 2015;6(3):115-31. Persian. doi: [10.22059/JAPR.2015.58398s](https://doi.org/10.22059/JAPR.2015.58398s)
8. Pourheydari S, Bagherian F, Bahadorkhan J, Doustkam M. [The effects of life skills training on marital and sexual satisfaction of young couples]. *Knowledge & Research in Applied Psychology*. 2013;14(51):14-22. Persian.
9. Aida Y, Falbo T. Relationships between marital satisfaction, resources, and power strategies. *Sex Roles*. 1991;24(1-2):43-56.
10. Karney BR, Frye NE. "But we've been getting better lately": comparing prospective and retrospective views of relationship development. *J Pers Soc Psychol*. 2002; 82(2):222-38. doi: [10.1037/0022-3514.82.2.222](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.2.222)
11. Blum JS, Mehrabian A. Personality and temperament correlates of marital satisfaction. *J Pers*. 1999;67(1):93-125. doi: [10.1111/1467-6494.00049](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6494.00049)
12. Roizblatt A, Kaslow F, Rivera S, Fuchs T, Conejero C, Zacharias A. Long lasting marriages in chile. *Contemp Fam Ther*. 1999;21(1):113-29.
13. Morgan ME. *Relationship satisfaction in mixed deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing couples*. [Dissertation]. Washington DC: Graduate School of Gallaudet University; 2013.
14. Schumm WR, Paff-Bergen LA, Hatch RC, Obiorah FC, Copeland JM, Meens LD, et al. Concurrent and discriminant validity of the kansas marital satisfaction scale. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 1986; 48(2):381-7. doi: [10.2307/352405](https://doi.org/10.2307/352405)
15. McIntosh A. *Marital satisfaction and conflict styles in deaf-hearing couples: a comparison*. Proceeding of the 5th Annual Hawaii International Conference on Social Sciences; 2006 May 31 to June 03; Honolulu, Hawaii.
16. Lehane CM, Dammeyer JI, Elsass P. Sensory loss and its consequences for couples' psychosocial and relational wellbeing: an integrative review. *Aging ent Health*. 2017;21(4):337-47. doi:

- [10.1080/13607863.2015.1132675](https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2015.1132675)
17. Yorgason JB, Piercy FP, Piercy SK. Acquired hearing impairment in older couple relationships: An exploration of couple resilience processes. *J Aging Stud.* 2007; 21(3):215-28. doi: [10.1016/j.jaging.2006.10.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2006.10.002)
 18. Johnston-McCabe P, Levi-Minzi M, Van Hasselt VB, Vanderbeek A. Domestic violence and social support in a clinical sample of deaf and hard of hearing women. *J Fam Violence.* 2011;26(1):63-9. doi: [10.1007/s10896-010-9342-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-010-9342-4)
 19. Mastrocinque JM, Thew D, Cerulli C, Raimondi C, Pollard RQ Jr, Chin NP. Deaf victims' experiences with intimate partner violence: the need for integration and innovation. *J Interpers Violence.* 2015. pii: 0886260515602896. doi: [10.1177/0886260515602896](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515602896)
 20. Anderson ML, Leigh IW, Samar VJ. Intimate partner violence against Deaf women: a review. *Aggress Violent Behav.* 2011;16(3):200-6. doi: [10.1016/j.avb.2011.02.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2011.02.006)
 21. Heiman E, Haynes S, McKee M. Sexual health behaviors of deaf american sign language (ASL) users. *Disabil Health J.* 2015;8(4):579-85. doi: [10.1016/j.dhjo.2015.06.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dhjo.2015.06.005)
 22. Tavakoli M, Talebi H, Shomeil Shushtari S, Aghaei E. [The mental health of hearing impaired adults]. *J Rehab Med.* 2015;4(4):142-7. Persian.

Archive of SID