



Original Article

Compassionate Love in Marital Satisfaction among Married Couples between the Ages of 25-60 in the Kandy District

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Abstract

Background: Compassionate love plays an important role in marital satisfaction. The success of a marriage is disrupted due to factors such as a lack of support, and nurturance by partners, and not being able to share each other's feelings freely which have led to stress, depression, divorce, and suicide. The current study identified three age categories namely young-aged couples, middle-aged couples, and old-aged couples.

Objective: The current study aims to identify whether compassionate love leads to marital satisfaction in the three age categories.

Methodology: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted using 242 married couples through convenient sampling in the Kandy District. Data were collected by completing the Compassionate Love Scale for Specific Close Other and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (online), and the responses were recorded individually. The linear regression analysis was carried out using SPSS version 25. Ethical approval (KIU/ERC/21/13) was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of KIU.

Findings: The sample included three different age categories namely, young-aged couples (54.1%, $n=131$), middle-aged couples (28.1%, $n=68$), and old-aged couples (17.8%, $n=43$). The result revealed that there is a weak positive significant correlation between compassionate love and marital satisfaction in young-aged couples, middle-aged couples, and old-aged couples with ($r=0.34$, $p<0.01$ ($M=28.9$ $SD=\pm 3.07$), $r=0.26$, $p =0.027$ ($M=43.8$ $SD=\pm 4.17$), $r=0.357$, $p=0.019$ ($M=54.8$ $SD=\pm 2.63$) respectively).

Conclusion: The findings showed that although compassionate love is correlated with marital satisfaction in the three age categories, the relationship is not very strong.

Keywords: *Compassionate Love, Marital Life, Marital Satisfaction*

Introduction

Marriage is considered important in shaping many people's lives (King, 2016) as it is one of the foundations for family life (Tummala, 2008). The purpose of marriage is satisfaction, love, companionship, children, adult identity, commitment, and personal fulfillment, etc. (Benokraitis, 2015). A satisfying marriage gives the spouse physical and emotional comfort, stability, spiritual friendship, and reassurance (Benokraitis, 2015). Thus, the spouses become complementary to each other by providing fulfillment of basic needs such as biological, mental, psychological, or spiritual. Partners find love and compassion, comfort and stability, tenderness and reassurance, and incline towards each other. This satisfying state can be achieved through compassionate love (Underwood, 2002). However, guaranteeing marital satisfaction in marriages is problematic due to the dissatisfaction and distress between the couples (Carr, 2000).

Factors such as stress and depression are caused due to lack of support, and nurturance by partners which was initiated by not being able to share each other's feelings freely (Carr, 2000). This has led to health problems such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and a high suicide rate among men than women (4 to 1) in the US (Scourfield & Evans, 2015). It results in divorce (Knox & Schacht, 2010) which is also a main problem in Sri Lanka (Amarathunga & Wickramaarachchi, 2018).

Sabey, Rauer, and Jensen (2014) have shown that the attitude of compassionate acts is linked to the sacredness of the marriage. Those who were able to withhold these two in their daily life exhibited satisfying relationships (Stanley et al., 2006). Another study by Sabey and Rauer (2017) indicated that compassionate love decreased over a year. However, they mentioned that this

is not unexpected because other types of love too decrease similarly. There are few longitudinal studies to prove the fact that love decreases over a year (Berscheid, 2010). According to Hodes and Suzman (2007), the decline in the aggregate level of compassionate love may be due to the increasing need to take care of spouses and depending on each other as they become old.

Love as a feeling or emotion is not long-lasting in a marital relationship because feeling or emotion is a physiological arousal that has a climax and after it reaches the climax, it disappears (Hatfield & Walster 1978). Passionate love in a marriage does the same because marital satisfaction declines within a year or two into marriage (Hatfield et al., 2008). Therefore, the current study focuses on the love exhibited through behaviors, expressions, and actions that will help enhance marital satisfaction.

The current study is significant as it will help married couples gain a method to promote their well-being, and distressful couples will gain a way to get relief from their distress. The service providers for couples and families like counselors, psychologists, therapists, social workers, etc. will gain insight into the couples' well-being with special reference to compassionate love to deal with their health promotion and problems.

The previous works of literature capture the importance of compassionate love among young-aged couples and old-aged couples but not among middle-aged couples. The current study focuses on addressing the limitation by including middle-aged couples. Thus, the current study focuses on age categories which include young-aged couples, middle-aged couples, and old-aged couples. These three categories of people serve an important function in the operation of compassionate love in marital satisfaction. Therefore, the current study aims

to identify whether compassionate love leads to marital satisfaction in the three age categories.

Methodology

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 242 married couples using convenient sampling method in the Kandy district since it is one of the districts higher in intimate partner violence (Country Profile on Gender-Based Violence in Sri Lanka [CPGBV], 2018). The data were collected from February 2022 to May 2022. Ethical approval (KIU/ERC/21/13) was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of KIU.

The participants were assessed using self-administered questionnaires which consisted of a demographic scale, a Compassionate Love Scale for Specific Close Others (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005), and an ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (Fowers, & Olson 1993). The former scale had a Cronbach alpha value of 0.86 and the latter had a Cronbach alpha value of 0.94. The Compassionate Love Scale for Specific Close Other is a unidimensional scale that measures the presence of compassionate love for a specific close other. The score is calculated by adding the scores in all the items and dividing it by the number of items. The average score for a specific close other or marital partner is 5.92 (Sprecher & Fehr 2005). The score of an individual should be 5.92 or greater to determine whether an individual has compassionate love or is high in compassionate love. It has a Cronbach alpha value of 0.86 (Sprecher & Fehr 2005). The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction consists of two subscales: The marital Satisfaction Scale and Idealistic Distortion Scale. Individual scores are calculated by reverse scoring the negative items and summing up the appropriate items for each scale. Then the percentile scores are found using the norm table. Finally, the score is obtained by

the following formula in which PCT= percentile score for the Individual marital satisfaction scale and the ID= percentile score for the idealistic distortion scale: $EMS = PCT - [(0.40 * PCT) (ID * 0.01)]$. The higher score an individual gets, higher the marital satisfaction (Nunes et al., 2022). It has a Cronbach alpha value of 0.94 (Fowers, & Olson 1993).

The scales were translated into Sinhala and Tamil languages and were validated. The face and content validity were derived for both the Compassionate Love Scale for Specific Close Others and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale, and the translated and validated scales showed good reliability of 0.96 and 0.89 respectively. The questionnaires were distributed online through a Google form and the link to the questionnaire was shared via social media platforms such as Email, and WhatsApp. The respondents were asked to fill out the questionnaire independently.

SPSS- version 25 was used for data analysis. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis was carried out to determine the relationship between compassionate love and marital satisfaction in different age categories.

Results

Demographic details of the participants

The current study comprised 242 married couples, and among them 53.7% were females ($n=130$) and 54.1% of married couples belonged to the young aged-couples category. The mean age of the participant was 37.72 ($SD=\pm 10.79$). Most respondents were employed which is 62% ($n=150$). Table 1 shows the demographic details of the participants.

Table 1: Demographic details of the participants

Variables	Frequency (n=242)	Percentage (%)
Age		
Young-aged couples (25-35 years)	131	54.1
Middle-aged couples (36-49 years)	68	28.1
Old-aged couples (50-60 years)	43	17.8
Gender		
Male	112	46.3
Female	130	53.7
Employment		
Employed	150	62.0
Unemployed	92	38.0

Assessing compassionate love and marital satisfaction

Table 2 gives the frequency of married individuals under the three age categories who are low and high in compassionate love by using descriptive statistics. Overall, most married individuals (76.9%, n=186) show high compassionate love ($M= 6.18$, $SD=\pm .84$). The mean score of the marital satisfaction scale is 52.4 ($SD=\pm 11.35$).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the compassionate love scale

Age category	CLS category		Total	M	SD
	Low	High			
25-35	24 (18.3%)	107 (81.7%)	131	6.2	.83
36-49	17 (25%)	51(75%)	68	6.1	1.04
50-60	15 (34.9%)	28 (65.1%)	43	6.1	.52
Total	56	186	242		

Note: CLS= Compassionate Love Score.

Predicting Compassionate Love and Marital Satisfaction among the three age categories

The linear regression analysis showed that compassionate love is correlated with marital satisfaction ($p<0.01$). Further, it showed a weak positive significant relationship between compassionate love and marital satisfaction among the three age categories: young-aged couples, middle-aged couples, and old-aged couples ($r=0.34$, $p<0.01$ ($M=28.9$ $SD=\pm 3.07$),

$r=0.26$, $p = 0.027$ ($M=43.8$ $SD=\pm 4.17$), $r=0.357$, $p=0.019$ ($M=54.8$ $SD=\pm 2.63$) respectively. Table 3 shows the r values and the p values of these age category groups. The scatter plot related to the young-aged category (figure 1), middle-aged category (figure 2), and old-aged category (figure 3) is also depicted.

Table 3: Linear Regression Analysis on compassionate love and Marital Satisfaction in three age groups

Variables	R-value	P value
Young aged couples	0.342	0.01 *
Middle-aged couples	0.269	0.027*
Old-aged couples	0.357	0.019*

* $P \leq 0.05$

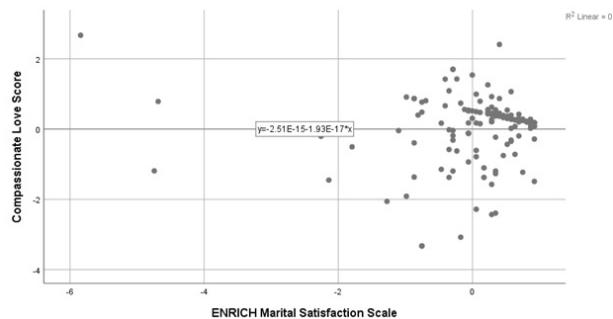


Figure 1: Young-aged-category

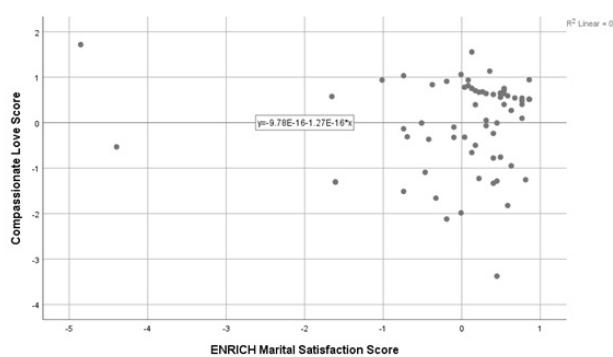


Figure 2: Middle-aged category

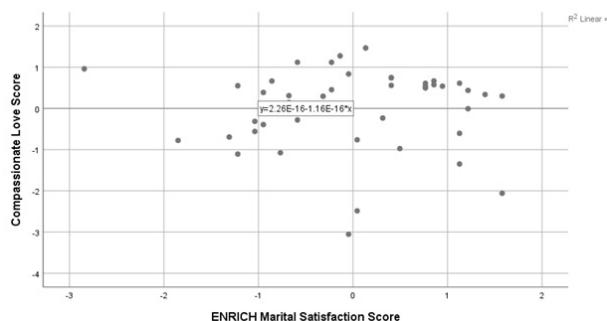


Figure 3: Old-aged category

Discussion

The current study revealed that most individual married couples show high compassionate love. Similarly, most individual married couples also show marital satisfaction. Further, the linear regression test conducted in the current study revealed that compassionate love shows a weak positive significant correlation with marital satisfaction among young-aged couples, middle-aged couples, and old-aged couples.

Neff and Karney (2009) have shown that only a subset of newlywed couples showed a positive global view of their partners, they were accurate in their perception of understanding each other, and these couples seem to engage in compassionate love in their marriage. However, the current study has not only focused on compassionate love in marital satisfaction among young-aged couples but also among middle-aged and old-aged couples. Further, Williamson & Lavner (2021) has shown that most spouses (Mean age for women 26.3 ($SD = \pm 5.0$) and mean age for men 27.9 ($SD = \pm 5.8$) show marital satisfaction during the newlywed years and the current study also shows marital satisfaction among the individual married couples in the young-aged category ($M=28.9$ $SD=\pm 3.07$).

However, scarcely any previous works of literature have been researched focusing on middle-aged couples whereas the current study has addressed the gap. Compared to young married couples ($p < 0.01$), there seems to be a reduction in compassionate love among middle-aged couples ($p = 0.027$) according to the current study. It may be due to two reasons. One reason is the smaller number of middle-aged samples compared to the young-aged sample. The other reason is the challenges and barriers in the marriage and midlife years. Middle age is an important stage in human life where people engage in work life, marital life, and personal life. Moreover, the middle age period of life needs adjustment in relationships which is a great challenge. Some of these challenges are inter-generational ties, relationships with in-laws, nest syndrome, and boomerang generation (Benokraitis, 2015). It is surprising those middle-aged married couples who responded show compassionate love positively influences their life in the current study. From the responses to the questionnaires, it can be understood that they adjust well to their most challenging period of life while maintaining marital satisfaction.

Moreover, Eva Kahana et al. (2020) examined the impact of compassionate love on older couples' later-life psychological well-being. The study result showed an increased feeling of being loved and love for others and it has led to the reduction of depressive symptoms and the expression of high positive feelings. The current study has also emphasized the impact of compassionate love on marital satisfaction among old-aged couples.

Overall, the current study showed compassionate love is correlated with marital satisfaction among the three age categories, namely young-aged couples, middle-aged couples, and old-aged couples, and the previous studies have proven it. Further, this study is unique in that it addressed

the gap in the literature by examining the impact of compassionate love on marital satisfaction among middle-aged couples.

Conclusion

The findings of the current study showed that compassionate love is an important factor that increases marital satisfaction among married

couples in the three age categories. Research on the concept of compassionate love is new to the field of psychology in Sri Lanka. This study will be useful in the psychology field to emphasize the importance of compassionate love which helps to create a successful family life while dissolving problems that arise in a family and forming long-lasting relationships.

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