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Relationship between Sexual Fantasy, Sexual Communication, Personality Traits and Sexual Satisfaction in Married Individuals

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 26 July 2021

Accepted: 9 August 2021

Published Online: 15 August 2021

Keywords:

Sexual fantasy

Sexual satisfaction

Sexual communication

Personality traits

Married individuals

ABSTRACT

The study aimed to understand the relationship between sexual fantasy, sexual communication, personality traits and sexual satisfaction in married individuals. Sexual fantasy as a variable has seldom been studied in the Indian context. The importance of sexual fantasies has been noted by therapists and researchers. Studying various aspects of sexual functioning in married life including, sexual communication and sexual satisfaction and personality traits would be beneficial. A cross sectional design with a total sample of 100 married individuals was considered. Tools were administered as online forms. Parametric and Non-parametric tests were used to find the correlation between Sexual fantasy and sexual satisfaction, sexual communication and sexual satisfaction and personality traits and sexual satisfaction. Results indicated that sexual fantasy and sexual satisfaction have a negative correlation, sexual communication and sexual satisfaction have a positive correlation and personality traits and sexual satisfaction also have a positive correlation. This study can be used to develop modules that might aid in marital and sex therapy. It may be useful in identifying any difficulties or issues which may help in providing appropriate timely intervention.

1. Introduction

Indian culture and societal standards are immensely varied. Similar variation can be seen when sex is the topic of discussion. Sexual attitudes and relations are diverse and are deeply rooted in religion and customs. To speak of ironies, India played a very significant role in understanding the act of sex as a science and coincidentally harbors taboos about the same. Considering the social stigma and sociocultural expectations, the most common attitude towards sex is of silence.

Sexual fantasies have seldom been spoken about,

especially in a country like India. Sexual fantasies though universal by nature, are theoretically elusive and even taboo in many cultures. Sexual fantasy can be defined as mental images or thoughts that are sexual by nature and can enhance or influence one's sexual experience. Sexual fantasizing often includes activities that one cannot achieve in real life. There are many factors that can affect one's fantasizing, leading to understanding one's basic need for sex. A healthy relationship often has a component of sexual fantasies, to achieve pleasure. Many fantasies are not played out, but some find it liberating when it's

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played out in role-play^[1].

It is imperative to understand the role of sexual fantasy in the context of marriage, more importantly in the Indian context. Confusion and contradictions exist in the system of marriage, owing to the shift of traditional values to a more modern one. The traditional marital system gives precedence to the extended family over individual needs, leading to intrusions in intimacy and inability of having a satisfactory sexual life^[2]. It has been seen that sexual fantasy is related to multiple variables associated with sexual satisfaction in marriage. Sexual fantasies were reported to increase level of sexual activity and hence, enhance sexual experience^[3]. Increase in sexual fantasies leads to an increase in frequency of orgasms, sexual desire, and fewer sexual difficulties. In fact, lack of sexual fantasies can lead to sexual dysfunctions^[4]. A study reported that around ninety seven percent of the subjects had indulged in sexual fantasies and that a greater number of sexual fantasies experienced by women resulted in a more positive view about sex and they reportedly had more sexual experiences and partners. It was also seen that women who were more dissatisfied and anxious had more different types of sexual fantasies than women who were more satisfied and less anxious. In a study it was found that less sexual satisfaction leads to increase in frequency of sexual fantasy^[5].

A study done extensively on 38 married couples revealed their sexual fantasy pattern and it was seen that husbands had more sexual fantasies than their wives. Men were more inclined to have fantasies that involved multiple people. For both men and women, their respective partners half the time did not appear in their fantasies. Upon further analysis it was seen that fantasies for men involved a masculine self- image that can satisfy women. Women focused more on the emotional aspects and focused on the person in their fantasies^[6]. It has also been seen that women in distressing marriages fantasise more than women who are happily married^[7]. Mental imagery could be one of the most common techniques used to handle distressing situations.

Sexual communication is very important for the development and maintenance of sexual satisfaction^[8]. However, because of how vulnerable one might be in talking about sexual issues, it is not surprising to see that many couples don't communicate about sex at all. Disclosure of information related to sexual aspects of one's relationship like their desires and fears can lead to greater sexual satisfaction. Sexual fantasies are more private than talking about likes and dislikes and hence, are more difficult to discuss^[9]. A study suggested that partners who had open communication and were together for a longer

period of time had better relationship satisfaction^[10].

Gender differences have also been found in sexual communication. Research study conducted at Temple University with 202 university students who were in monogamous relationships concluded that participants who indulged in open sexual communication showed an increase in sexual as well as relationship satisfaction. More importantly, sexual satisfaction was more significantly correlated with open sexual communication. Open sexual communication has seen to be important for men in the beginning of the relationship and not of much worth as it progresses an one-year mark. Whereas for women, sexual communication is important for relationship satisfaction after an one-year mark. This could be because men start giving importance to other aspects of the relationship as it progresses, whereas the opposite is true for women^[11].

The amount and content of information revealed by the individual depends on the relational negotiation of rules one follows. The perceived privacy of the information is seen as one of the reasons one might not reveal sexual desires or issues. In a study it was found that the topics of conversation in young adults about sex included content of distrust, understanding and being afraid to talk to the partner. Since sexual fantasies are private by nature, the disclosure of fantasies may leave one feeling vulnerable^[12]. Hence, these researchers hypothesised that disclosure of one's fantasies can wither increase sexual rewards or lead to decrease in rewards due to stigma.

In order to understand whether one would disclose their sexual fantasies in a relationship, it is important to look at why one must avoid the topic itself. In a study done 140 women were surveyed and it was found that women refrained from discussing certain topics when they believed that the result would be futile, leading to dissatisfaction in a couple. It has been seen that one might avoid the topic of sexual fantasies in order to protect oneself from vulnerability and because they believe that no result can come from discussing it^[13]. Many researchers have also found that one's unwillingness to reveal sexual fantasy could stem from the lack of closeness in the relationship^[14]. Sexual communication increases as the relationship progresses and hence, one might not have built enough rapport to discuss sexual fantasies. The topic of sex in itself is enough to make one feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. It was seen that individuals want their sexuality to be seen as normal by the society and hence don't reveal their fantasies in the fear of being labelled sexually abnormal^[15].

In a review of literature done by Leitenberg and Henning (1995) it was seen that sexual fantasies were in itself associated with feelings of guilt. Sexual fantasies are

different from self-disclosure about likes or dislikes. The disclosure of sexual fantasies also depends on the rewards of doing so. In a study on 370 participants it was found that more than 81% participants reported that disclosure of sexual fantasies was important for the sexual relationship to last longer, reward of sexual fulfilment being received by discussing. The relationship between sexual fantasies and sexual communication has yet to be explored in depth. Many researchers have only focused on sexual likes and dislikes and hence understanding disclosure of fantasies is important as it can lead to enhancement in intimacy amongst partners ^[1].

Personality has seldom been studied in relation to sexual fantasies. In a study done by Renaud and Byers (1999) it was seen that sexual fantasies that have positive cognitions (acceptable and pleasant by nature) were more open to experiences and low on neuroticism as opposed to sexual fantasies that had negative cognitions (unacceptable and unpleasant) scored high on neuroticism and obsessiveness ^[16]. Personality traits such as neuroticism and psychoticism have been found to be related to selective mating in marriage. The personality traits of an individual directly influence partner communication styles. Sexual satisfaction has also been seen as a result of extraversion and introversion in couples. The dimensions of personality like extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism, have been seen to provide more variance in the personality domain being measured and it has been used in studying many important human behaviour ^[17].

In a study done in 102 married couples studying at midwestern United States public university, couples whose personalities were compatible and incompatible were studied on their sexual satisfaction levels. It was seen that females did not have a significant difference in sexual satisfaction scores between personality compatible and incompatible couples. Interestingly, there was a significant difference for men with greater sexual satisfaction between compatible and incompatible adults. Females are more likely to be sexually satisfied in marriage when their partners have a similar personality as them. For men there is no difference in sexual satisfaction when the spouses differ on personality factors like extraversion, introversion and neuroticism. But when sexual satisfaction was seen in relation to psychoticism, it was seen that men have greater sexual satisfaction when their partners are the same level in psychoticism ^[17].

The importance of studying and understanding sexual fantasies has been noted by therapists and researchers. This study will provide new insights to understand sexual fantasies in the context of marriage. It will open doorways in understanding various aspects of sexual functioning in

married life including, sexual communication and sexual satisfaction. This is highly relevant in a country like India where topics like sexual fantasies are seldom studied. There is a dire need to educate and facilitate change in this sphere. Development of proper interventions can lead to tackling problems in the sphere of sexual satisfaction in married individuals, ultimately leading to an increase in marriage satisfaction and well-being.

2. Objectives

- To study the relationship between sexual fantasies and sexual satisfaction in married individuals.
- To study the relationship between sexual communication and sexual satisfaction in married individuals.
- To study the relationship between personality traits and sexual satisfaction in married individuals.
- To study the interrelations among sexual fantasies, sexual communication, personality traits and sexual satisfaction in married individuals.

3. Hypothesis

H₀₁: There exists no relationship between sexual fantasies and sexual satisfaction in married individuals.

H₀₂: There exists no relationship between sexual communication and sexual satisfaction in married individuals.

H₀₃: There exists no relationship between personality traits and sexual satisfaction in married individuals.

4. Methodology

4.1 Sample

The sample size consisted of 100 participants (N=100), 50 males and 50 females. The participants consisted of married men and women living in India. The participants were of age range 21-45 from urban setting in Mangalore, Karnataka and other states. Sampling technique employed was convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Exclusion criteria consisted of individuals who are single/unmarried, divorced, or separated and individuals with any diagnosed psychiatric illness were not considered.

4.2 Procedure

The participant Information Sheet and Informed consent was provided to them. After taking the consent, tools were administered, using google forms. The scoring was done and analysis was carried out using Statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) vs. 25.0.

4.3 Tools

The tools used were the International Index of Erectile Function – 5^[18], Female Sexual Function Index – 6^[19], Sexual Daydreaming Scale of the Imaginal Process Inventory^[20], Dyadic Sexual Communication Scale^[21], Interpersonal Exchange Model of Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire^[22], Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised^[23].

4.4 Data Analysis

Statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) vs. 25.0 was used to do the analysis. $P < 0.05$ was considered as significant. Descriptive statistics like the mean and standard deviation of each group were calculated. Correlation was done by studying Pearson and Spearman Correlation.

5. Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for sexual fantasy, sexual communication, personality traits and sexual satisfaction. The initial data set consisted of 122 participants out of whom 22 responses were removed either because of incomplete responses or not meeting the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Also, participants who have been diagnosed with a mental illness were removed from the data. ($N=100$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the Sample including standard deviation and mean

	Mean	Standard deviation
Sexual Fantasy	33.61	10.89
Sexual Satisfaction	29.97	5.55
Sexual Communication	42.62	6.89
Neuroticism	0.0392	0.195
Psychoticism	0.71	0.722

*Note: N for the Descriptive Sample = 100

The data were found to be normally distributed ($p > 0.05$). Hence Pearson’s rank correlation (r) analysis was done to find the relationship between sexual satisfaction and sexual communication and sexual fantasy. Table 2 shows Pearson rank correlation coefficients between sexual satisfaction and sexual communication and sexual fantasy. Spearman rank correlation was also used to find the correlation between sexual satisfaction and personality traits including psychoticism, extraversion and neuroticism.

Table 2. Pearson’s Inter-correlation Matrix among Sexual Satisfaction and Sexual Fantasy and Sexual Communication

	Sexual Fantasy	Sexual Communication
Sexual Satisfaction	-0.151**	0.603**

** $p < 0.001$ (2-tailed)

A weak negative correlation was found between sexual satisfaction and sexual fantasy ($r = -0.151$, $p < 0.01$) and a strong positive correlation between sexual satisfaction and sexual communication (0.603, $p < 0.01$).

Table 3. Spearman’s Inter-correlation Matrix among Sexual Satisfaction and Personality Traits

	Psychoticism	Neuroticism	Extraversion
Sexual Satisfaction	0.305**	0.249**	0.00**

** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

A weak positive correlation was found between sexual satisfaction and psychoticism ($r = 0.305$, $p < 0.01$) and neuroticism ($r = 0.249$, $p < 0.01$). No correlation was found between sexual satisfaction and extraversion.

6. Discussion

The current study aimed to study the relationship between sexual fantasy, sexual communication, personality traits and sexual satisfaction in married individuals. Indian marital relationships are different from western marital relationships. The cultural difference in individualism and collectivism sets stage for each of them. In individualistic cultures, romantic love dominates the conception and satisfaction in marriage. On the other hand, more objective criteria like an appropriate match in religion, education, age and livelihood are considered. The cultural aspects of love and satisfaction are very different when one moves from the west towards the east, where more traditional values of family are considered pivotal. The extended family and the community one belongs to become an important criterion in understanding marriage in India. Satisfaction in the home sphere in India seems to be a result of socioeconomic factors than marriage. Marriage is a strong fulfilling commitment to cultural obligations but comes after practical concerns like money and status. Satisfaction on the personal front also seems to increase, especially for women when they have children, because the identity of a woman in India is often limited to child care^[2].

The collectivistic roots of familial relationships place less value on intimacy and companionship in marriage. The intrusion of the extended family when living in a joint family structure and the absence of privacy leads to difficulties in achieving less sexual satisfaction in marriage. The presence of romance in marriage can often only be seen in music and Bollywood movies. Women ache for the fantasy of a Jodi (pair) and hence are disappointed when they don’t receive the satisfaction of companionship in marriage^[24,25].

Sexual satisfaction is an important component of a

marital relationship. It evaluates the dimensions involved with one's sexual relationship^[22]. In the current study, sexual fantasy, sexual communication and personality traits of extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism were considered as correlates of sexual satisfaction in a marriage.

The first objective was to study the relationship between sexual fantasy and sexual satisfaction and it can be seen that there is a weak negative correlation ($r = -0.151$, $p < 0.01$) between the two. It has been seen in previous research that disclosure of sexual fantasies can either lead to an increase in overall relationship satisfaction or can lead to loss of role and relationship and stigma^[12]. Because of the private nature of one's fantasy, one might not indulge in revealing the content in the context of one's relationship. As can be seen, sexual fantasy decreases when one's sexual satisfaction is more and vice versa. The stigma associated with indulging in fantasy when the cultural context of shame is involved with the general idea of sexual activity is important to understand.

In Indian Hindu marital relationships, the aim is on Dharma (practicing one's religion), Praja (reproduction) and Rati (gratification of sexual pleasure). The duty one feels to one's elders in India is not subsided till one produces a child^[26]. Hence the ideas of self-disclosure, interdependence and emotional warmth are not determinants of a satisfactory married life in India. The act of sex is seen as a duty in many ways. Hence the mere imagination of sexual acts could be considered a sin. This can be seen in the low mean scores of sexual fantasy and sexual satisfaction in the population.

The mean age of the sample considered in the study is 31 years and the mean duration of marriage is 8 years. In married couples, a frequent complain of decrease in quality and quantity of sex can be seen. The reason one might argue for such decline can be because of the increase in age leading to decrease in sexual and physical functioning and because of the familiarity one has towards their partner, where sex becomes a mundane activity. The sharing of sexual fantasies can be seen as one way of increasing sexual activity and passion. It can be seen that couples with more sexual variety are more satisfied with their relationship.

The present research quantified sexual fantasy in the terms of frequency and it can be argued that the increase in sexual satisfaction could lead to a decrease in sexual fantasy since one might not see the need in indulging in fantasy. On the other hand, lower mean scores in sexual fantasy point to the fact that the use of sexual fantasy to increase sexual desire and decrease uninhibitedness is not

considered imperative. This could be due to the taboo and silence existing around sexual topics or the avoidance of sexual topics between the partners owing to the private nature of fantasies.

The second objective of the study was to understand the relationship between sexual satisfaction and sexual communication and the results report a positive correlation between the two. Sexual satisfaction influences sexual satisfaction in multiple ways like, increase in one's communication with their partner leads to an increase in sharing of one's sexual likes, dislikes and preferences and more communication can also lead to an increase in intimacy and overall relationship satisfaction. The number of rewards and benefits increases when one indulges in open communication about intimate topics like sex in their relationship^[27]. Increase in frequency and quality of sexual communication can be seen to enhance sexual satisfaction in married individuals. It also leads to dyadic adjustment in marital relationships^[8].

The third objective of the study was to understand the relationship between personality traits of extraversion, psychoticism and neuroticism with sexual satisfaction. Psychoticism can be defined as a personality type that likes odd and unfamiliar things, are aggressive to others sensation, risk taking and have narrow impulsivity. Neuroticism can be understood as one's reactivity to stressful situations. Individuals who are high in neuroticism are quick to worry, show anger and fear in a stressful situation. Extraversion can be understood as a personality type that includes individuals who are sociable, crave excitement and can be impulsive in nature^[23].

It was seen that psychoticism and neuroticism have a weak positive relationship with sexual satisfaction. The sample of the study includes individuals who are more psychotic in nature. Hence increase in sexual satisfaction in individuals who are more risk taking and impulsive by nature can be seen. The sample does not contain individuals who are extroverted by nature and hence no relationship between extraversion and sexual satisfaction can be established.

The final objective of the study was to understand sexual fantasy, sexual communication and personality traits in the context of sexual satisfaction in married couples. It can be concluded that there exists a relationship between all and it can be said that good communication leads to better satisfaction and at the same time greater sexual satisfaction leads to a reduction in sexual fantasy. The personality traits add an extra depth to understand the population.

The study provides a holistic understanding of sexual satisfaction by understanding sexual fantasy,

sexual communication and personality traits. It is of dire need as it is hardly a topic of conversation in our society. Creating awareness about sexual satisfaction is important for increasing a couple's intimacy. It may be of importance for understanding how fantasies could be used to better one's sexual satisfaction and how open sexual communication can lead to much better understanding of their partner's needs. The sharing of sexual fantasies and the fulfilment of the fantasy could add sexual variety and experimentation to a relationship. The current study adds to argument by sex therapists that sexual fantasies can help increase sexual arousal and satisfaction. It may help in developing modules that might aid in marital and sex therapy. It may be useful in identifying any difficulties or issues which may help in providing appropriate timely intervention.

7. Conclusions

The research aimed to see if there is a relationship between sexual fantasy, sexual communication, personality traits and sexual satisfaction. Sexual fantasy is seldom spoken about in India. It is imperative to study various correlates of sexual satisfaction to get a holistic understanding of marriage in India. It can be seen that there is a negative correlation between sexual fantasy and sexual satisfaction. There is a positive correlation between sexual communication and personality traits of neuroticism and psychoticism with sexual satisfaction. The personality trait of extraversion could not be elicited in the population studied.

The study provides a holistic understanding of sexual satisfaction by understanding sexual fantasy, sexual communication and personality traits. It is of dire need as it is hardly a topic of conversation in our society. Creating awareness about sexual satisfaction is important for increasing a couple's intimacy. It may be of importance for understanding how fantasies could be used to better one's sexual satisfaction and how open sexual communication can lead to much better understanding of their partner's needs. The sharing of sexual fantasies and the fulfilment of the fantasy could add sexual variety and experimentation to a relationship.

Types of personality has been linked with certain types of sexual dysfunctions. Studying sexual fantasies in relation to personality traits will help identify the areas of therapeutic interventions for these dysfunctions, which will help in promoting healthy sexual expression in a relationship. In couples' counselling, healthy sexual expression can be promoted and sexuality can be better understood if the link between sexual fantasies and personality is known. Deviant behaviour has also been

studied through the lens of personality. Adding the aspect of sexual fantasies can help in early intervention.

The current study adds to argument by sex therapists that sexual fantasies can help increase sexual arousal and satisfaction. It may help in developing modules that might aid in marital and sex therapy. It may be useful in identifying any difficulties or issues which may help in providing appropriate timely intervention. The study may also add to the existing body of literature in this field, and will provide new insights.

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