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Conceptualization of Marital Capital

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Abstract

Abstract

Effective and successful marriage is a complex and multidimensional concept, which requires a long time and frequent research to achieve its related concepts and identify its factors. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to conceptualize and define marital capital which can be used as a basic concept and substructure in the field of couples and families. Thus, using systematic concept analysis and the Delphi method in a group of experts in the field of couples, the researchers discussed the concept of marital capital. According to the results, marital capital is a set of assets, principles, and marital skills acquired during the shared life which is valuable for the couples. In addition to being a supportive and protective factor in couples' relations, it helps them satisfy continuity and strengthen marital relationships. This concept has been introduced in relevant sciences; therapists can help couples lead their lives on the right track by taking advantage of it within couple therapy and premarital counseling. Hence, if this study has developed just one important idea, which is to increase marital stability and satisfaction by presenting the concept of marital capital, it would be significant.

Introduction

A stable and long-term marriage is often considered a major life goal and a key indicator not only for marital success but also for health and well-being (Margelisch et al., 2017). However, what is more important than marriage itself is the success of marriage and marital satisfaction (Tavakol et al., 2017) because in the absence of marital satisfaction, the likelihood of harm such as divorce and separation (i.e., the most painful and damaging events for families) increases (Yarigarravesh, 2022).

While some marriages end in divorce, some marital lives remain satisfying and stable. A fundamental assumption in research that focuses on family issues from the capabilities perspective (e.g., research on successful marriages) is that couples in stable and satisfying marriages are likely to have assets and resources (i.e., marital capital) that enable them to maintain their relationships in the face of life's inevitable stresses (Kaslow & Robison, 1996).

In recent decades, due to the high prevalence of divorce in many countries and its harmful consequences, conducting research on marriage has become increasingly important; it can indicate the necessity of conducting the present study. Moreover, helping to fill the gap in the literature on human sciences as one of the goals of the present study indicates the necessity of conducting this study. If we refer to the literature on human sciences, a specific and defined capital has been identified (i.e., psychological capital) for the individual, which is the smallest human unit. In the broader dimension (i.e., society and culture), there are also specific and defined capitals (i.e., social capital and cultural capital). If we consider the basic elements of society, the individual and the community, as two ends of this continuum, between these two poles lies the most basic unit and institution of society (i.e., the institution of the family whose central core is the husband and wife) which is an undefined and unspecified capital. Therefore, filling this gap with the title of *marital capital* is considered an innovation and initiative endeavor in the human sciences. In this research, the researcher sought to fill in the gap in human sciences by conceptualizing and defining *marital capital*.

Methods

In this study, the systematic concept analysis was used to obtain the concept of marital capital. Then, the Delphi technique was used to obtain a definition agreed upon by experts in the field of couple therapy and to validate it.

Concept analysis provides a perspective that distinguishes a concept from similar concepts (Hassani et al., 2017). It is an activity in which concepts, their characteristics, and their relationships with other concepts are identified (Heidari & Assarodi, 2015). Systematic concept analysis consists of six stages as follows: 1- Determining the purpose and scope of concept analysis, 2- Creating a general idea of the context, 3- Collecting materials, 4- Analyzing framework, 5- Systematic analysis of materials, 6- Drawing conclusions based on concept analysis (Heidari & Assarodi, 2015).

In the next stage, the Delphi technique was used to achieve a definition of *marital capital* based on the views and experiences of experts in the field of couple therapy. The experts were university faculty members, held PhD degrees in Psychology and Counseling, had a history of working in couple therapy, and had published scientific works in this field. In this stage, after presenting the research objective and the results of the systematic concept analysis to 11 experts in the field of couple therapy, the Delphi technique began and the experts were asked to define marital capital based on their expertise and experience in the field of couple therapy. After receiving the definitions from the experts, summarizing the definitions into several proposed definitions, and examining the level of agreement of the experts on the definitions through several stages, the experts finally reached complete agreement on a definition and finally provided examples for marital capital (Habibi et al., 2014).

Findings

Given the integration of the implementation and extraction stages in the systematic concept analysis method, the process of extracting the findings was as follows:

1. Determining the purpose and limits of the concept analysis
   According to experts in couples and families, some couples have resources, strategies, abilities, and capital that enable them to maintain their relationships well against inevitable life stresses (Kaslow & Robison, 1996). Therefore, our goal was to name these resources, strategies, and mutual capabilities of couples as *marital capitals*.
2. Creating a general idea of the context
   In this stage, the word *capital* was examined and analyzed in different fields. What does capital mean? What is its definition and application in different sciences and fields? Capital has been mentioned in dictionaries with different meanings, including obtaining, importance, value, ability, the essence of

something, and net worth. Moreover, in various sources and sciences, various capitals (e.g., psychological capital, social capital, cultural capital, human capital, financial capital, physical capital, symbolic capital, and natural capital) have been mentioned.

3. Collecting materials
   Considering the nature of capital, namely being valuable and beneficial to individuals to achieve their goals, the central idea of *marital capital* can be searched for in successful marriages and healthy marital relationships; therefore, in this stage, related literature and research were reviewed.
4. Analysis Framework
   The content and findings of the collected sources were analyzed focusing on what factors, what issues, what conditions, and how to help in achieving a successful marriage.
5. Systematic analysis of the materials
   By analyzing the relevant sources, it was determined that the factors that lead to a successful marriage are divided into two general categories of the factors related to pre-marriage and those related to post-marriage. The first category includes the factors that positively affect the successful marriage before marriage. However, the second category includes the factors that couples acquire during marital interactions and in their marital lives. Accordingly, the definition and examples of marital capital should be sought during the couples' marital lives and marital relations.
6. Conclusion based on concept analysis
   According to the results of the concept analysis, *marital capital* can have the following characteristics:
   1. It is obtained during marital life.
   2. It is valuable and has benefits for the marital relationship and common life.
   3. It is not simply accumulated and increased; rather, it is used.
   4. It can include several factors in the marital relationship.
   5. It creates a feeling of happiness and peace in couples.
   6. It helps them peacefully resolve conflicts and even life crises.
   7. It can be an obstacle to divorce and a reason for stability and satisfaction.
   8. The lack or absence of it can be one of the causes of divorce in couples.

In the next stage, the Delphi technique was used to achieve a more precise definition that was agreed upon by experts in the field of couple therapy and to validate it. The final definition of marital capital in the form of the content validity form (CVR) is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the Delphi technique and content validity for the definition of marital capital

The definition of marital capital	I agree	I disagree
A set of marital assets, principles, and skills acquired during the marital life that are valuable to the couple. In addition to serving as a support and protective factor in the couple's relationship and helping them through conflicts and crises in life, it contributes to the satisfaction, continuity, and strength of the marital relationship.	11	0

Finally, experts provided examples of marital capital, including love, commitment and trust, mutual understanding, healthy communication, conflict resolution, sexual satisfaction, mutual support, consultation, honesty, forgiveness, respect, and correct boundary setting.

Discussion

Among the contextual and fundamental factors that help researchers and even therapists in research on marriage is the creation and application of technical concepts in this field. In this study, by conceptualizing and defining *marital capital* with the help of specialists in the field of marriage, an attempt was made to help fill in the gap in counseling and couples therapy and to use the concept of *marital capital* as an underlying construct in both basic research and therapeutic research in the field of marriage.

Many marriage experts believe that achieving a thriving marriage is not a sudden event and that marriages thrive when equipped with specific components and strategies for this journey (Hatami Varzaneh, 2015). According to the researchers of the present study, this necessary equipment for a thriving marriage is *marital*

capital. Marital capital is not just one factor but can include multiple factors that highlight their value and help couples achieve their goal of a successful marriage. It includes the principles, skills, assets, and achievements of the couple during their marital life. In various studies, several factors have been identified as factors affecting a successful marriage, such as commitment (Clyde et al., 2020; Hou et al., 2019), love and intimacy (Moon et al., 2021; Postler et al., 2022), healthy relationship beliefs (Johnson et al., 2020), healthy communication (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022; Shifaw, 2024), respect (Kazim & Rafique, 2021), conflict management (Abida Ajid et al., 2024; Shifaw, 2024). According to the definition of marital capital, these factors can be considered because they are considered protective and supportive factors of marital life and help couples achieve a satisfying and stable marriage (Karimi et al, 2019). The results of this study can be used as a guideline for couples, counselors, and therapists, especially pre-marital counselors, to help guide couples in the right direction by informing them of the real capital that leads to happiness.

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