



Job Stress and Marital Satisfaction in Married Nurses: The Mediating Role of Self-Regulation in Relationship

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ABSTRACT

It is well acknowledged that the stress of work can influence marriage outcomes. Some jobs such as working in a hospital and dealing with patients are very stressful. However, despite the emphasis on the role of work stress in different areas and marital satisfaction in previous research, there is little information about the effect of adaptive processes such as self-regulation in the relationship on nurses' marital satisfaction. The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model implies that a successful adaptive process can possibly help individuals mitigate stressful events and raise satisfaction in marriage. The current study aimed to investigate whether the job stress of married nurses can influence their marital satisfaction, and also to examine the mediating role of relationship self-regulation. A total of 252 married nurses from nine governmental and five private hospitals in Tehran were participated. Hospitals were selected by convenient sampling and voluntary to contribute. To collect data, Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), Relationship Self-Regulation (RSR) and the Job-Related Tension Index (JRTI) were given to volunteer nurses who agreed to complete the questionnaires. The results indicated a significant negative association of job stress with marital satisfaction and a positive relationship of relationship self-regulation with marital satisfaction. Also, it was confirmed that relationship self-regulation has a mediating role in the relationship between job stress and marital satisfaction. The current study showed how the adaptive process may help to increase marital satisfaction in a stressful environment among married nurses.

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Introduction

Nursing is a profession characterized by a number of aspects not experienced in the utmost other occupations (Kirkcaldy & Martin, 2000). Working long hours, variable shifts, weekends, and involving death are some of the situations that nurses are dealing with (McGrath et al., 2003). Some research on Iranian nurses has demonstrated that nurses perceive high-stress levels and revealed that the working conditions of Iranian nurses lead to tensions as high as 57.4%, (Mortaghi Ghasemi et al., 2011). Selye (1976) indicated that nursing is one of the most stressful professions and that the quality of their personal lives declines under stressful situations. Other studies have reported that the working condition of nurses influences negatively their family life and other activities and disrupts their mutual activities with their spouses, which also influence their psychological health and marital life (Elquist, 2004; Ahram & Karwowski, 2012; Heidari & Hosseinpour, 2007), and may diminish the quality of marital relationships lead to marital dissatisfaction (Peiman et al., 2013; Rajabi et al., 2013). Marital satisfaction as a result of interactions between couples is used to assess the level of happiness and stability of marriage and is sometimes defined as an important indicator of success in marriage (Khalatbari et al., 2013), and is defined as a feeling of happiness, satisfaction, and pleasure experienced by spouses considering all aspects of their lives (Anderson et al., 1983). Marital satisfaction as a sensitive construct is always exposed to various life stressful events and affected by them (Murray et al., 2015; Cohan & Cole, 2002). Stress is a multidirectional construct resulting from the interaction of the person and his living environment (Bilotta & Evans, 2013), and job stress is defined as an emotional and physical reaction to job requirements, especially when it does not match a person's resources and capacities (Lindholm, 2006; Nakasis & Ouzouni, 2008).

Shreds of evidence showed that work anxieties, including the intense workload or work strain, have been related to lower marital quality as demonstrated by a considerable bulk of cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys (Carnes 2017; Debrot et al., 2018; Ford et al., 2007; Kazmi et al., 2017). Job stress has further been linked to aggressive psychological and

physical disposition, communication problems, and relationship discontent and termination (Buck & Neff, 2012; Lavner & Clark, 2017; Vatharkar & Aggarwal-Gupta, 2020). An instance of scarce investigation working on stress levels in spouses monitored communications between couples before and after their involvement in a stress-driving job. After such a stressful job, a 40% drop was observed in the spouses' interaction quality (Bodenmann & Shantinath, 2004). Additionally, some studies imply that rises in daily work stress were linked to less acceptance of opinions by members of the family (Crouter et al., 2001). Likewise, a longitudinal study examined marital satisfaction and changes in acute stress during a period of 4 years and found less satisfaction in participants with their connections during high-stress periods (Kamey et al., 2005).

To understand how job stress affects marital satisfaction, the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation (VSA) model was introduced by Karney and Bradbury (1995) the explains the consequences of marital quality arise from experiencing adaptive and conflicting processes. This model justifies how stressful events affect couples' interactions through an adaptive process (Cohan, & Bradbury, 1997). Relationship Self-regulation (RSR) as an adaptive and relationship maintenance mechanism that was first proposed by Halford, et al., (1994) originated from the theory of self-regulation and refers to the regulation of behaviors, thoughts, and emotions in relation to others (Halford et al., 2007). RSR is the ability of couples to perceive relationship activity patterns and vigorously participate in supporting a healthy marital relationship (Halford et al., 2007) and consists of two components including relationship strategies (activities that lead to relationship development) and relationship effort (consistency in the use of strategies) (Halford et al., 1994, Wilson et al., 2005).

Relationship strategies include self-change conducts accomplished to make an effective relationship; for instance, trying to enhance an individual's own self-expression hoping to manage marital struggle in a better manner (Wilson et al., 2005; Rackham et al., 2017). The amount or strength of consistency applied in the change process for those particular conducts is defined as relationship effort (Halford et al., 1994). The RSR strategy concentrates on ways of successfully changing partners' own behaviors within the association instead of focusing on the incidence of specific relationship



actions (Brown et al., 2016). Studies showed that couples who use the RSR mechanism have a higher experience of marital satisfaction (Halford et al., 2007; Brown et al., 2016) and greater levels of commitment in their marital life (Novak et al., 2018), and vis-versa couples reported poor RSR exhibited reductions in marital satisfaction for both associates over time (Ripoll-Nuñez & Cifuentes Acosta, 2019). In addition, RSR has a mediating role between family dysfunction and marital satisfaction (Hardy et al., 2014). Since job stress as a stressful event affects adaptive procedures within marital relationships, the VSA model explains this association (Alexandrov et al., 2005), and so, the RSR fits with the VSA model; in empirical terms, such adaptive procedures as RSR are linked to both quality and stability of relationship according to a theory initially developed by Karney and Bradbury (1995).

Since there is little knowledge about the effect of self-regulation on marital satisfaction (Halford et al., 1994; Hardy et al., 2014; Girgždė et al., 2014) and the expectation that the current study could help the further expansion of investigation on nurses' marital life issues by considering how RSR is related to marital satisfaction of married nurses, the present survey tried to investigate the possible contributions of external stress in confining intimate experiences within the relationship. Moreover, a proposition of this research is that external stress may indirectly influence the marital outcomes of nurses through RSR. Thus, the current study evaluates how married nurses' marital satisfaction is predicted by the stressors they typically confront in the hospital. The effect of RSR is also assessed as a mediator in the relationship between job stress and marital satisfaction. The hypotheses offered below were examined based on the theoretical model proposed by Karney and Bradbury (1995) and the experimental research concerning stressors, adaptive process, and marital satisfaction,

1. Relationship self-regulation significantly mediates the relationship between job stress and marital satisfaction.

Methods

Participants

Data were collected from 252 married nurses from nine governmental and five private hospitals in Tehran, the capital city of Iran. The married

nurses and hospitals were selected by convenient sampling and voluntarily contributed. The inclusion criteria included the Iranian nurses who were married for over one year and lived jointly in the same location. Exclusion criteria include nurses who were widowed or divorced or nurses whose marriage duration was less than one year. To collect data, questionnaires were given to volunteer nurses who agreed to complete the questionnaires. In order to comply with the ethics of the research, permission to enter the hospital and permission to complete the questionnaire were obtained from the supervisors. All nurses were informed about the confidentiality of personal information and the name of the hospital where they work. A total of 350 questionnaires were given to participants. Completed questionnaires were collected after five months. The total completed survey for analysis in the current study consisted of 252 married nurses of which 191 (75.7%) and 61 (24.3%) were women and men, respectively. The participants' average age was 37.19 years ($SD=6.9$, range=22-70). They were married for on average 11.6 years ($SD=7.53$, Range 1-36), and the number of their children ranged between 0-4.

Measurements

Marital Satisfaction (MS).

Marital satisfaction was evaluated herein using the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) (Hendrick et al., 1988). It contains 7 items with a seven-point Likert scale from *low* to *high* in which better satisfaction is represented by greater scores. RAS has been shown to have a high internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of .86 (Hendrick et al., 1988). The convergence validity of this scale with the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale in the research of Dehshiri and Mousavi (2015) was reported as .74 and the Life Satisfaction Scale was .55. In the current study, the RAS reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .85$ was obtained.

Relationship Self-Regulation (RSR).

The Behavioral Self-Regulation for Effective Relationships Scale (Wilson et al., 2005) in 16 items was employed including two subscales of relationship strategies (10 items) and efforts (6 items) on a 5-point scale of *not true at all* to *very true*. The internal consistency of this assessment was .88 (Wilson et al., 2005). Items 4, 6, 7, and 11 were deleted because of their low factor loading. In the current study, after deleting 4 items, its alpha was estimated at



.83. This scale was used by the forward-translations and back-translations method, so it was first translated into English by a professional familiar with English and then translated back into English to know the accuracy of the translation.

Job Stress (JS).

The Job-Related Tension Index (JRTI) (Wooten et al., 2010) contains 12 items detailing symptoms of job conflict or ambiguity. The responders were requested to approximate the frequency of being troubled by every sort of symptom on a 6-point Likert scale (from *never* to *almost always*). This scale has three subscales including performance, workload, and organizational design. Two items had a low factor loading (Below .30) and were deleted to fit the model. JRTI has reported internal consistency reliability of .87 (Wooten et al., 2010), and Barkhordari et al. (2019) calculated the correlation of this scale with the work-family conflict questionnaire -.42. with an alpha of .77 estimated in this investigation.

Data analysis

The “Statistical Package for Social Sciences” (SPSS) version 24 (IBM Corporation, 2018) was used for descriptive statistics and correlations. The mediation hypothesis was tested by SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) and the bootstrapping method with the software “Analysis of Moment Structure” (AMOS) version 24 (Ackerman, 2003). So, for analyzing the data using the structural equation modeling (SEM) method, the univariate normative assumptions were tested by estimating skewness and kurtosis values, and outliers' values were measured using the MahalaNobis distance method. The covariance results between the observed variables showed that the assumptions of linearity and multicollinearity were observed.

Findings

The mean, standard deviation, and actual range of the variables of the current study, as well as inter-correlations of study variables are presented in Table 1. The correlations were all of statistical significance. Marital satisfaction had a positive and negative correlation with RSR ($r = .61, p < .05$) and job stress ($r = -.35, p < .05$), respectively.

Table 1. Mean, SD, and Pearson correlation coefficients of studied variables

Variables	1	2	3
1-Job stress	(.40)		
2-Relationship self-regulation	-.42**	(.30)	
3-Relationship satisfaction	-.35**	.61**	(.50)
Mean	36.92	56.96	34.96
Standard deviation	8.33	9.13	9.24
Actual Range	14-58	39-78	7-49

Note: Correlations are below the diagonal, AVE is presented on the diagonal, in parenthesis

Measurement Model Fit

The measurement model included marital satisfaction, job stress, and RSR as latent variables. The degree of the model fit for each construct is evaluated based on fit indices. To fit the model, Kline (2015) suggests using indices of the model fit such as the Chi-square/Degree of Freedom Ratio (*CMIN/DF*), the Goodness-of-Fit Index (*GFI*), the Comparative fit index (*CFI*), and the Tucker-Lewis Index (*TLI*). If three of the fit indices are equal or greater than 9, it is an acceptable fit index (Kline, 2015). Furthermore, when the root means the square error of approximation (*RMSEA*) ranges lower than .05 is good and between .05 to .08 is acceptable (Fabrigar et al., 1999). As noted by Kline (2015) and also according to the examination of the measurement model, the model fulfills the suggested requisites (*CMIN*= 615.6, *df*= 360, *CMIN/df* =1.71, *p* = .001, *CFI* = .90; *TLI*=.88; *GFI* =.87, *IFI*, .90, and *RMSEA* = .05).

Structural Model

In the current study, job stress and self-regulation were presented as exogenous variables and marital satisfaction was presented as an endogenous variable. The structural path coefficients between the job stress and relationship self-regulation, the independent variables, marital satisfaction, and the dependent variable were estimated by the structural model procedure which can see in Figure 1. Generally, the structural model outcomes revealed a good model fit for the data (*CMIN*= 644.5, *df*= 360, *CMIN/DF* = 1.79, *CFI* = .90, *GFI*=.87, *TLI* = .88, *IFI*= .90, and *RMSEA*= .05).

According to Figure 1, the result shows that RSR is positively affected marital satisfaction ($\beta = .66, p < .01$). This figure shows that the effect of self-



regulation in the marital relationship on increasing relationship satisfaction in married nurses is positive and direct. Furthermore, this figure shows a negative association between job stress and RSR ($r = -.61, p < .01$). With increasing job stress and decreasing self-regulation in nurses, the direct effect of job stress on marital satisfaction is negative and non-significant. The direct and indirect effects of job stress on marital satisfaction for investigating the mediating effect of self-regulation in the relationship are shown in Table 2.

Altogether, the above variables elucidate 45% of the variance of marital satisfaction among married nurses in Tehran. The results confirm hypotheses 1.

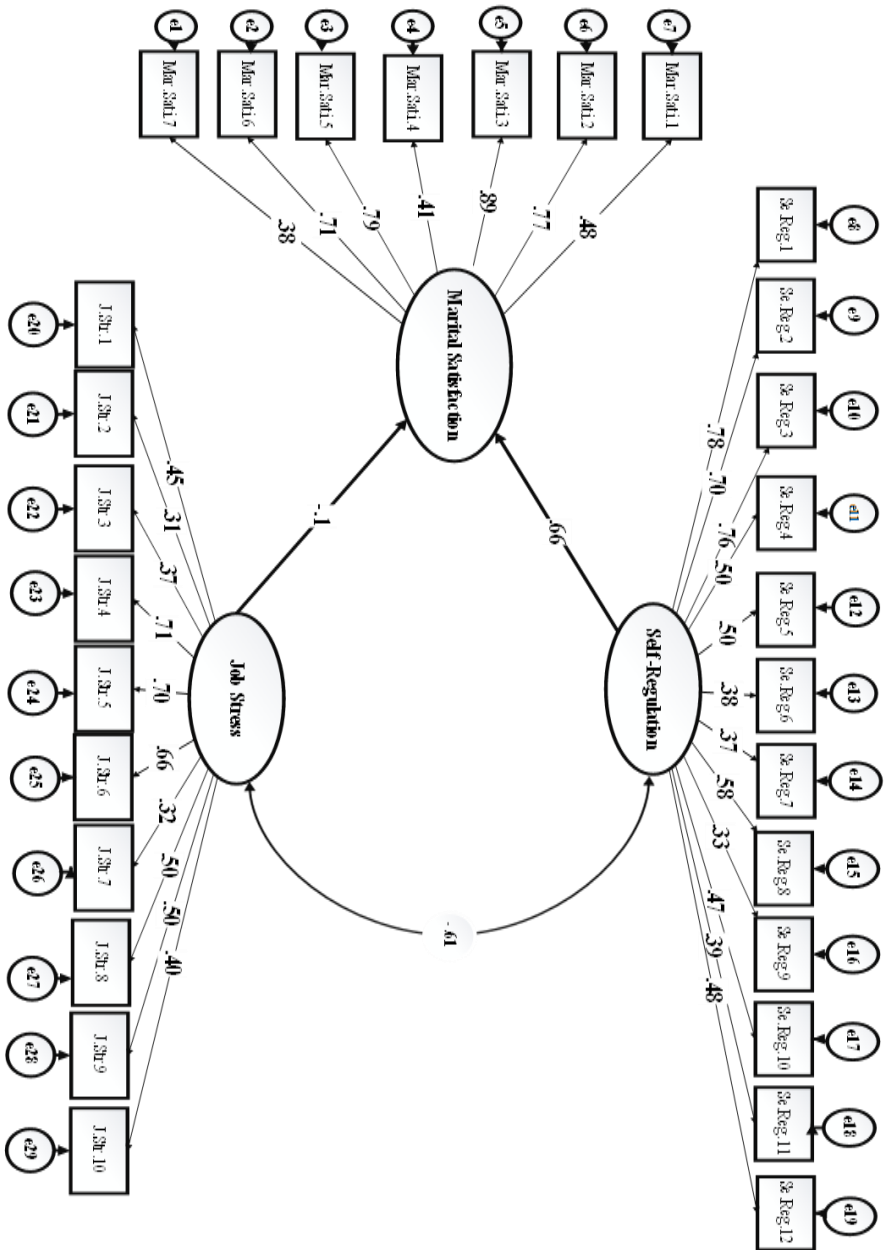


Figure 1- A path analysis of the relations between MS (endogenous variable) and JS & RSR (exogenous variables)



Mediation Test of Relationship Self-Regulation (RSR)

As shown in table 2, self-regulation plays the role of mediator in relation to job stress and marital satisfaction. The statistical significance of the indirect impact of job stress on marital satisfaction through RSR was examined by the bootstrapping approach. To this end, an alpha level of .05 through a 95% bias-corrected *CI* was established for the statistical significance of the indirect effect. Also, 5000 bootstraps for each sample with substitutes were taken out from the full dataset. A *CI* of zero implies that a significant mediation effect is absent at a level of .05. Additionally, a full mediation is proven with the inclusion of the mediator when the *p*-value is not significant for the association between exogenous (job stress) and endogenous variables (marital satisfaction). Partial mediation is, however, obtained with a significant *p*-value for the connection between exogenous (job stress) and endogenous (marital satisfaction) variables, which drops in the case of mediator inclusion (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Table 2 indicates that the associations between job stress and marital satisfaction are mediated by self-regulation in marital relationships. Approaching *CI* to zero implies that there is not a significant mediation impact at a level of .05. On the other hand, full mediation is established if the *p*-value is non-significant for the correlation between job stress and marital satisfaction. Table 2 indicates that the associations between job stress and marital satisfaction are mediated by self-regulation in a marital relationship in the full model ($\beta = -.41$, $SE = .19$, 95% $CI = -.53, -.26$), whereas the direct model is non-significant ($\beta = -.01$, $SE = .19$, 95% $CI = -.45, .45$). Based on the discussed results, it can be concluded that the hypothesis supports that RSR significantly mediates the relationship between job stress and marital satisfaction. So, the association between job stress and marital satisfaction is fully mediated by self-regulation in marital relationships.

Table 2. Testing Mediation of Self-Regulation in Relation between Job Stress and Marital Satisfaction

Effect		Bootstrap estimate		Bias corrected 95% confidence interval	
		Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper
Direct Model					
Marital satisfaction	<--- Job stress	-.42**	.19	-.53	-.26
Full Mediation Model					
Marital satisfaction	<--- Job stress	-.01	.19	-.45	.45

Note: ** $p < .001$

Discussion

The current study gives additional insight into the marital relationships of nurses regards to the working environment. The survey has also explored different facets of how external stressors such as job stress impact marital quality outcomes and internal marital processes that promote or inhibit this association. This research will enrich the literature on the research conducted in the field of stress and marital relationships of nurses under the influence of the work environment. The findings also provide new insights for practitioners and educators working with couples. The findings of this study, which are based on the VSA model, test support the hypotheses of this study that job stress has a negative significant correlation with marital satisfaction among the studied married nurses in Tehran. As a result, the present outcomes recommend that job stress can play a contagious role and affect the marital experiences of married nurses. Also, the finding showed that higher RSR has a positive association with marital satisfaction. In addition, the mediation role of RSR between job stress and marital satisfaction has been confirmed. This research sampled a group of nurses, part of whose job stress can be considerably maximal and present extensive variation.

Consistent with the hypothesis, these observations confirm prior reports regarding possible negative aftermaths of job stress on marriages (Bodenmann, 2015; Falconier et al., 2015; Falconier, et al., 2016). Nurses' work situation (e.g., shifting hours) creates a conflict role between family and occupational chores and negatively affects marital satisfaction (Grosswald, 2004). The previous studies claimed that jobs with non-standard hours which engage with high stress have a negative effect on family and marriage



(Grosswald, 2004, Rosen-Grandon et al., 2004; Colligan & Rosa, 2001). These studies support the finding that job stress is associated with significant outcomes for nurses and that additional stress negatively affects marital satisfaction. The challenging job circumstances and the related aftermaths result in inconsistency and stress in the couples' relationships. Accordingly, work problems and issues can affect marital life. Besides, the findings reveal a significant effect of nurses' job stress on marital satisfaction. This is because a high amount of time is spent in the workplace by nurses, where they have many duties. They may also encounter restrictions in their tasks and functions, particularly in the home setting. Altogether, the results indicated that the impacts of job stress on couples functioning in marriage are primarily direct.

Regarding the association between RSR and marital satisfaction, the findings propose a positive association between RSR and marital satisfaction. This survey offers a significant development of prior studies that demonstrated RSR to be a dependable cross-sectional associate of marital satisfaction. The present study demonstrated that RSR is related to the interruption of marital satisfaction being a wide-range connection. The outcomes of this investigation endorse and develop preceding studies on RSR and its effect on developing marital satisfaction (Wilson et al., 2005). Moreover, satisfaction with marital relationships was found to be linked to RSR (Halford et al., 2007). Accordingly, RSR may conduct spouses to be capable of better adapting via modifications in beliefs, moods, and behaviors, as well as changing the way of interactions by means of emotional control and regulation. RSR also may have the potential as a beneficial instrument to understand how partners maintain relationship satisfaction, and also for directing teaching contents in educational curricula for marital relationships.

Furthermore, RSR accounts for the connection between stress and marital satisfaction. According to these results, although work-related stress as external stress reduces directly couples' satisfaction with their association, RSR can buffer this effect and helps couples to increase marital satisfaction. In other words, being involved in positive dual handling to cope with various stressors has been reported to be linked to greater degrees of relationship satisfaction (Falconier et al., 2016). Altogether, it is discussed that RSR affects the expansion and preservation of relationship satisfaction (Halford et al.,

1994). Moreover, it consists of Halford et al. (Halford et al., 1994) the finding demonstrated that the satisfaction of each spouse was greatly correlated to his/her own instead of the couple's self-regulation. This reveals that each spouse should try individually to improve and maintain a jointly satisfying relationship.

Conclusion

Based on the importance of self-regulation in the marital relationship, the present study provides a clearer view of the role of dyadic adaptive processes in the relationship between stress in the workplace and marital relationships. The survey has also explored different facets of how external stressors such as job stress impact marital quality outcomes and internal marital processes that promote or inhibit this association. By doing so, this work advances the literature on the stress and marriage of nurses, their marital processes, and their interplay. The present survey could help the further expansion of investigation on nurses' marital issues by considering how the adaptive process may help to increase marital satisfaction in a stressful lifestyle among married nurses.

Implications

The results of the present research could inform the community health nurses to provide a better environment to reduce the pressure and stress of nurses' jobs to help to decrease the conflict between their family and marriage. The finding also may be applied to marital education. Couple educators generally provide relationship self-regulation programs as a framework for intervention and education. In addition, the findings of this study give this perception of nurses' marital life and the effect of RSR to increase their marital satisfaction and give them this awareness of how job stress influences their marital life. Also, a high RSR might help nurses to have a better relationship with their patients and colleagues in the work environment, which reduces their job stress, which can be a topic in future research. The findings also provide more insights for practitioners and educators working with couples.

The cross-sectional nature of the research, the use of self-report questionnaires, and the possibility of social desirability in responding to the questionnaires, especially when the supervisors were aware of the completion



of the nurses' questionnaires, can be considered as the limitations of the present research, which the study on working conditions of nurses and its effect on marital relationships through in-depth interviews can provide more useful results for future research.

Ethical considerations

This investigation was administrated in accordance with the ethical standards of the 1964 Helsinki declaration. All participants were informed of voluntary participation, and also were assured that personal information would remain anonymous.

Conflict of Interest. There are no personal or organizational conflicts of interest for this study.

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