

The Criteria of Choosing a Right Partner From the Point of View of Unmarried Students of Semnan University of Medical Sciences

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Background: Regarding the process of increasing the divorce rate in recent years and youth population, the awareness among the youth, especially the university students, about marriage and criteria of choosing a right partner for proper planning to preserve family is of great importance.

Objectives: The aim of this study was to investigate the viewpoint of unmarried students of Semnan University of Medical Sciences about the criteria of choosing the right partner.

Materials and Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted on 271 unmarried students at Semnan University of Medical Sciences in the academic year of 2011. A researcher-made questionnaire containing demographic data (10 questions), the criteria for choosing a partner (36 questions) and 5 open questions were handed out among the students. The questionnaires were collected and the data were analyzed using KS test, t, Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests.

Results: From the point of view of the students, the criteria such as loyalty, commitment to the ethics, personality traits, compatibility and ethical understanding are of top 5 priorities for choosing right partner, respectively. There was a significant relationship between the significance level of some criteria and gender so that the psychological and social criteria (commitment to the ethical principles and accountability) and aesthetic or physical criteria (beauty and good-looking appearance) were so important for girls and boys, respectively.

Conclusions: The results of the study showed that, from the point of view of the student, the sustainable and fundamental criteria for choosing the right partner are of great importance. Accordingly, it is recommended that, by considering the cultural, religious and social criteria, the opportunities for shaping the positive personality, psychological and social traits and institutionalizing the ethics in society should be provided. Public education plans, especially training the families can play an important role in this regard.

Keywords: Criteria; Mate Selection; Students; Health Occupations; Viewpoints

1. Background

Marriage is the first phase of family cycle and a right family is the most important factor in creating a right society; thus, marriage is a significant issue and choosing a proper partner is the key infrastructure for starting a family, in this regard (1). The human is authorized to select and bases some criteria for each wanted or unwanted selection. Choosing a right partner for marriage is the most important choice with enduring consequences; so, forethought is logical for this issue (2). In fact marriage is so important in the religion of Islam and even in Quran, starting a family, causes mind rest and feeling safety and is the root of love and mercy. To reach this goal, the couples should consider proper criteria for choosing each other (3). One of the biggest challenges impeding the marriage for youth is choosing a right partner. It means that the boys and girls do not really know the criteria and characteristics of choosing a proper mate. If they do not care about this issue, there will be bad consequences, which may be irrecoverable. From the point of view of so-

cial science scholars, one of the painful social problems in our community is divorce and it results from lack of cognition and deep pondering in choosing mate (4). In the past, the marriages were done based on dependence-selection, meaning that the parents were responsible to choose a right partner based on the family interests and benefits, but regarding the gradual evolution at the community level, the requirements and expectations changed and accordingly the past methods are useless. In Iran, families play an important role in choosing a mate more than what the western societies do so that we can conclude that the Iranian families consider choosing a right partner for their children as one of their duties. But the Iranian youth become more active in choosing mate (5). On one hand, Iran is moving toward modernism like other developing countries and it causes widespread changes in entire social phenomenon such as marriage and partner choosing and on the other hand, performing research on the criteria of choosing partner, regarding

the high rate of giving birth in 1360's, youth population of Iran, increasing the number of university students and placing on the 6th phase of Ericson and marriage age in current period is important (6). The importance of marrying and choosing a mate is as much that in Iran and other countries, various studies were done regarding it. In a study by Hamidzade et al. the most important criteria of marriage are mental maturity, appearance, modesty and kindness, being faithful and social and family status (7). In a study by Haghhighizadeh et al. the most important criterion for marriage was ethics from the point of view of most boys and girls, which there was a significant difference between boys and girls (8). Rezaean et al. stated in their studies that there is a significant difference between the point of view of male and female students regarding the criteria of choosing a mate. The biological and psychological-social criteria were important for male and female students, respectively (9). In a research done by Maliki et al. for more than 90 % of students, personal traits, the power of fertility and education are the most important factors for choosing a right partner (10). In the studies of Torkarlan et al. most male and female students consider the good temper (11).

At the first sight, varying the criteria of choosing makes this process difficult but considering the fundamental criteria makes it easy. By doing comparative study about the criteria, it is concluded that two criteria involve in choosing a right partner. The first category of criteria is related to the traits, ethics and beliefs which is more sustainable and enduring, the second one is related to the appearance, economic conditions and welfare and the like that is less sustainable and enduring, accordingly, we can name the first category as the "primary criteria" and the second one as the "secondary criteria". If the youth find that they must insist on the primary criteria and prioritize the primary and enduring criteria with internal aspect to the secondary one with external aspect, they can make logical decision (2). Those who are active in scientific fields and need a science-based life had better choose a mate with the same interest and talent so as to cope with the restrictions and difficulties in life, standing these challenges requires cognition, talent and interest. Those who intend to burden the great responsibilities in the future and drive their life toward evolutions and changes, expects his partner to give a hand; so he should choose a logical, strong and purposeful partner (12). One of the most fundamental social behaviors is marrying and starting a family and making an effort to preserve it, the youth, especially the university students who are the key capitals and working force of society, and the development of country depends upon effort and perseverance of these people and on the other hand, most students are at marriage age and partner choosing. According to the statistics by Organization for Civil Registration, the marriage age increased in recent years and the rate of divorce have been rising considerably so that in 1390, the country witnessed 874792 cases for marriage and 142841 cases for

divorce and the ratio of marriage to divorce decreased from 9/8 in 1383 to 6/1 in 1390 (13), which suggests the negative viewpoint of youth to marriage and improper choosing. Thus, considering the marriage and reviewing the viewpoint of students can help decrease the rate of divorce and increase the inclination to get married and follow the right principles for choosing a partner.

2. Objectives

The present study aimed to determine the criteria of choosing a right partner from the point of view of the unmarried students of Semnan University of Medical Sciences during 2011-2012 and to present the strategies by determining the point of view of the students and to correct the negative views and train them the right method of choosing a proper partner so that we can take effective steps by assistance.

3. Materials and Methods

This cross-sectional study was performed on the unmarried undergraduate students of Semnan University of Medical Sciences during 2011-2012. To calculate the number of samples in a primary study consisting of 50 samples and SD of each 30 questions related to marriage criteria with 99%CI, 2% Accuracy and 1.5 effects, the number of samples equals for each question by which the maximum number was estimated to be 350 samples. The method of sampling was quota. In this study, 350 unmarried university students were selected, which the number of students in each faculty was determined compared to the population of the students. After receiving the approval from the committee of ethics of the university, the researcher handed out the questionnaires to unmarried students attending in different classes, clarifying the aim of the study and ensuring the students for the information being confidential and after filling them out, he collected them. The researcher-made questionnaire consisted of three parts such as demographic data, the criteria of choosing a right mate and 5 open questions. The section related to the criteria of choosing a partner contains 30 questions about the given criteria and 6 questions about the importance of premarital cognition, family satisfaction, consultation with family members, friends and others based on the point of view of students and students rated them as very important, almost important and less important. Finally, 5 questions assigned to the level of education, age difference, occupation, the most important factors for getting married and the greatest hindrance. The validity of the questionnaire was investigated and confirmed by the related professors using the method of assessing the content validity; the stability of the questionnaire was also estimated by the internal stability on 20 samples, calculating 75% Cronbach's alpha. To streamline the statistical analysis, the scores of 1-4 were assigned to the options of less important, almost important, important and very important, respectively. After calculat-

ing mean and SD, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used for normalizing data, t test for comparing the two independent groups, Mann-Whitney test for comparing the ordinal responses and Kruskal-Wallis test for comparing more than three independent groups with ordinal responses in Sig level of 5% using SPSS 17.

4. Results

The results showed that of 271 unmarried students of Semnan University of Medical Sciences, 70.1 % were female and 29.9 % were male. Seventeen percent of the cases aged between 20 and 24, the mean age of them was 21.0 ± 1.9 ; 67.9 % were undergraduate students, 52.4% were local students of Semnan city and 52.4% with 5-6 family members (Table 1). Regarding the priority of criteria for choosing a partner, the findings showed that for unmarried students of Semnan University of Medical Sciences, the criteria such as loyalty (mean 3.88), the moral and commitment to the ethical principles (mean 3.84), the personality traits (mean 3.81), compatibility (mean 3.80) and ethical understanding (mean 3.79) are top 5 priorities. Other criteria such as the hair color (mean 2.16), fellow-citizenship (mean 2.40), skin color (mean 2.41), and good-looking appearance (2.80) were the least important criteria (Table 2). Regarding the relationship between the importance level of criteria for choosing a partner and gender, statistical test showed that there is a significant relationship between gender and some criteria. Thus, for the girls, the criteria like loyalty, accountability, personal traits, sociability, compatibility, nobility, common culture, common language, mutual respect, financial status, creativity are of great importance. And for boys, the criteria such as beauty, skin and hair color, physical appearance, being obedient are so important (Table 3). The findings of research showed that 37.6% of total students and 45.7 % of female students with B.A, 50% with M.A and 78% with PhD degree would like to marry to the highly educated boy, while 54.5 % of male students with B.A prefer a graduated girl, 50% with M.A prefer girls with PhD and 41.7% with PhD prefer girls with PhD and 37.5% of them prefer girls with B.A degrees. The findings of the study showed that 34.4 % of the students prefer to have working wife and 31.4 % prefer to be colleagues with their wives, 29.5% prefer the age difference for 4 years, more than 79% prefer 2-5 years of age difference. The findings showed that, the premarital cognition with mean of 3.61 is important for the students. The statistical test showed a significant relationship between age and level of premarital cognition. There was a significant difference between the students aged below 20 and the students aged above 25 ($P = 0.012$) so that this criteria is highly important for the students aged more than 25 years old (mean of 3.90 vs. 3.38), for the students, satisfaction of their family (mean of 3.56), satisfaction of partner's family (mean of 3.49) and consultation with family (mean of 3.53) are important. For the students, acquaintance with partner by others (mean of 2.39) and consultation with

friends for choosing a partner (mean of 2.31) were less important. The statistical test showed a significant relationship between gender and the importance of consultation with friends. There was a significant difference between male and female students ($P = 0.045$) so that consultation with friends for choosing a partner (mean of 2.48 vs. 2.23) is more important for boys. The findings of the study showed that 40.2 % of the students considered high expectations and 29.9% considered financial problems as the biggest hindrance for marrying, on the other hand, 69% of the students considered meeting the emotional needs as a good reason to get married and just 5.5 of the students believed that performing the religious assignment is the most valuable reason.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Personality Traits of Under Study Cases

Personality Traits	No. (%)
Gender	
Female	190 (70.1)
Male	81 (29.9)
Age, y	
< 20	50 (18.5)
20-24	211 (77.9)
≥ 25	10 (3.7)
Education degree	
B.A	184 (7.9)
M.A	4 (1.5)
General PhD	83 (30.6)
Religion	
Muslim	269 (99.3)
Non-Muslim	2 (0.7)
Father's job	
Small business	116 (42.8)
Staff	108 (39.9)
Retired or passed away	47 (17/3)
Mother's job	
House keeper	213 (78/6)
Staff	47 (17/3)
Retired or passed away	11 (4/1)
Residence	
Semnan Province	97 (35.8)
Tehran	81 (29.9)
Others	93 (34.3)

Table 2. Mean and SD, the Criteria of Choosing a Partner From the Point of View of Under Study Cases According to Their Priority^a

Criteria of Choosing a Partner	Mean ± SD	Priority
Loyalty	3.88 ± 0.41	1
Ethics	3.84 ± 0.45	2
Commitment to principles	3.84 ± 0.43	2
Personality traits	3.81 ± 0.48	3
Compatibility	3.80 ± 0.45	4
Ethical understanding	3.79 ± 0.47	5
Mutual love	3.76 ± 0.55	6
Accountability	3.76 ± 0.56	6
Social personality	3.75 ± 0.46	7
Mutual respect	3.72 ± 0.50	8
Mental traits	3.70 ± 0.54	9
Health	3.68 ± 0.50	10
Common culture	3.60 ± 0.62	11
Common religion	3.58 ± 0.76	12
Social communications	3.52 ± 0.66	13
Confidence	3.46 ± 0.66	14
Nobility	3.45 ± 0.75	15
Emotional traits	3.39 ± 0.65	16
Common language	3.30 ± 0.91	17
Obedience	3.20 ± 0.78	18
Social class	3.09 ± 0.86	19
Financial status	3.00 ± 0.85	20
Physical appearance (fat or thin)	3.00 ± 0.82	20
Creativity	2.98 ± 0.85	21
Appearance charm	2.90 ± 0.78	22
Social status and occupation of the parents	2.81 ± 0.92	23
Beauty	2.80 ± 0.80	24
Skin color	2.41 ± 0.96	25
Fellow-citizenship	2.40 ± 1.08	26
Hair color	20.16 ± 1.00	27

^a data are presented as Mean ± SD.

Table 3. Mean and SD, the Criteria of Choosing a partner From the Point of View of Under Study Cases According to Gender ^a

Criteria of choosing a partner	Gender		P Value
	Female (n = 190)	Male (n= 81)	
Loyalty	3.89 ± 0.37	3.85 ± 0.50	0.436
Ethics	3.86 ± 0.43	3.78 ± 0.50	0.182
Commitment to principles	3.86 ± 0.43	3.78 ± 0.42	0.011
Personality traits	3.84 ± 0.44	3.74 ± 0.54	0.141
Compatibility	3.85 ± 0.43	3.70 ± 0.49	0.023
Ethical understanding	3.82 ± 0.45	3.74 ± 0.49	0.243
Mutual love	3.75 ± 0.57	3.79 ± 0.49	0.436
Accountability	3.84 ± 0.46	3.57 ± 0.61	<0.001
Social personality	3.79 ± 0.44	3.65 ± 0.48	0.025
Mutual respect	3.78 ± 0.46	3.59 ± 0.54	0.008
Mental traits	3.73 ± 0.53	3.63 ± 0.54	0.173
Health	3.61 ± 0.75	3.49 ± 0.76	0.245
Common culture	3.70 ± 0.49	3.64 ± 0.53	0.866
Common religion	3.67 ± 0.60	3.43 ± 0.63	0.005
Social communications	3.58 ± 0.64	3.37 ± 0.68	0.016
Confidence	3.52 ± 0.76	3.30 ± 0.72	0.024
Nobility	3.38 ± 0.89	3.12 ± 0.94	0.035
Emotional traits	3.44 ± 0.68	3.36 ± 0.62	0.339
Common language	3.39 ± 0.66	3.38 ± 0.60	0.889
Obedience	3.12 ± 0.81	3.38 ± 0.66	0.011
Social class	3.14 ± 0.83	2.69 ± 0.91	0.115
Financial status	3.12 ± 0.82	2.73 ± 0.97	< 0.001
Physical appearance (fat or thin)	2.92 ± 0.82	3.19 ± 0.81	0.013
Creativity	2.92 ± 0.89	3.12 ± 0.71	0.044
Appearance charm	2.86 ± 0.93	2.69 ± 0.90	0.157
Social status and occupation of the parents	2.75 ± 0.76	3.26 ± 0.69	< 0.001
Beauty	3.38 ± 1.08	2.46 ± 1.09	0.588
Skin color	2.57 ± 0.76	3.35 ± 0.62	< 0.001
Fellow-citizenship	2.18 ± 0.91	2.94 ± 0.87	< 0.001
Hair color	2.03 ± 0.92	2.48 ± 1.10	0.001

^a data are presented as Mean ± SD.

5. Discussion

Regarding the importance of choosing a right partner as a base of starting family and consequently creation of a safe community, the present study aimed to determine

the criteria of choosing a partner from the point of view of the unmarried students of Semnan University of Medical Sciences. In this study, loyalty, ethics and commit-

ment to principles, personality traits, compatibility and ethical similarity were the top 5 prior criteria, respectively which are subcategories of psychological- social criteria. These findings are consistent with those of other studies in which the above-mentioned criteria are considered as the most important priorities in choosing a partner. The study by Todosijev (2003) in Serbia showed that loyalty is the first and honesty, mercy, confidence, love and caring are of the second priority. Heydari (2006) from Mazandran University of Medical Sciences mentioned ethical understanding, loyalty, accountability, and love as the most important criteria, Harazi (2001) from Yazd University of Medical Sciences (Shahid Saadooghi) stated faithfulness to the religious tasks, being good tempered, accountability and loyalty in his research (12, 14, 15). We can conclude that today, in most countries throughout the world, one of the key factors of divorce is lack of loyalty and the main concern in the marital life is loyalty and commitment to the ethical and social principles, which was suggested in both Farsi and English studies mentioned above. The findings of this study showed that there is a significant relationship between gender and 17 criteria of 30 criteria. First five criteria for boys are loyalty, commitment to ethical principles, compatibility, personality traits, accountability and ethical understanding and for girls, loyalty, and commitment to ethical principles, love, personality traits/ethical understanding and compatibility are important which there was a significant difference, regarding three priorities, between the girls and boys conceptions. Totally, the psychological-social criteria (loyalty, accountability, Personality traits, sociability, compatibility, nobility, common culture, common language, mutual respect, financial status) and aesthetic criteria (beauty, charm, skin and hair color, physical appearance) are important for girls and boys, respectively, which is consistent with studies by Mosalanejad from Jahrom, Heydari from Mazandaran, Nasirzadeh from Tehran, Sharafkhani from Ilam, Rezaean from Toyserkan, Feingold and Schaffer from America suggest that boys regard the aesthetic criteria, physical appearance as the first priority and social criteria as the second priority while emphasizing on the mental and social criteria with respect to the emotional sensitivity (4, 6, 9, 12, 16-18). The point of view of students about the partner's job suggests its relationship with gender and education level of students. Most female students with B.A prefer staff husband and male students with PhD prefer a wife majoring in the same course and colleague that are consistent with the results of the studies by Heydari from Mazandaran and Harazi from Yazd. Clarifying this result, we should conclude that the mutual understanding with a partner affects on consistency of university major and job and with respect to the type of job, accountability of medical staffs and their social status, it seems that having a colleague partner is the best choice but lack of opportunity to play the parental role in family for the medical staffs is a thread

for reinforcement of family, in this case, we should predict some basic strategies such as accepting more responsibilities from partners and planning the working timetable for medical female staffs in order to prevent disorder in their role in family (12, 15). Based on the results of researches done, most students intended to choose a partner whose education level is higher or at least the same level. This perspective was common among the female students but for the male students, the same level of education and lower education level is important. These findings are consistent with the results of study by Forodastan from Isfahan, Heydari from Mazandaran, Haghghi zadeh from Ahvaz and Maliki from Nigeria. From these findings, we can conclude that the criterion of education level is one of the key criteria for choosing a partner. The studies of Baru and Byron (2004) and Myers (2005) suggest the direct relationship between mutual satisfaction and education similarity because this consistence can be a key factor of understanding between the partners. This finding suggests the attitude of educated female students in choosing a proper partner and with regard to daily increasing of this population with this viewpoint, we should acculturate in a manner that the criteria of higher education level won't be replaced by the key and sustainable criteria and on the other hand, we must provide the interest for boys to further their higher education (5, 8, 10, 12, 19). In this study, most students regarded the age difference between 2 and 5 years and girls prefer to choose a partner older than they are; this was consistent with the results of the study by Heidari from Mazandaran stating the age difference of 3-4 and of Mosalanejad stating the age difference of 3-5 years (4, 12). The socio-cultural roots and early physical and mental maturity in girls and the chance of fertility can confirm the belief that girls should be younger, but the least age difference should be considered because it can affect on the rate of satisfaction and mutual understanding (6). Most students considered emotional needs as a key factor for marriage which is similar to the results of findings by Harazi from Yazd and Shahriari from Ardestan (15, 20) and just 5.5 % of students considered performing religious assignments essential for marriage while in the study by Hamidzadeh Arbabi, 25% of students in Ardabil mentioned the marriage as a fundamental issue (7). These findings may suggest that something must be done for enhancing the divine belief toward marriage by media and official education. Most students regarded the high expectations and financial problems as the main hindrance to marriage. Financial problems and fear of poverty after marriage impede marriage as shown in the study of Hamidzadeh Arbabi from Ardabil and Shahidi from Kordestan, which is consistent with our findings. Although according to some psychologists such as Mazloo, essential needs are the bases for mental and psychological needs, Islam ordered not to delay the marriage due to the financial matters and relay on God's favor because

God is bountiful, as in He said: God will bestow his bounty in case they are poor (2, 7, 21). Most students prefer to consult with their family when they are about to choose a partner and consider the satisfaction of their family and spouse so important and they consult less with their friends in this regard, which is consistent with the study by Heydari from Mazandaran, Harazi from Yazd and Haghhighizadeh from Ahvaz, but despite the fact that marriage and choosing a partner are personal issues, importance of family satisfaction for the students suggests the significant role of family for guiding their children to make decisions and training family to give consultation and guidance can be helpful (8, 12, 15). Most students regard premarital cognition and its effect on successful marriage significant which is consistent with the results of the studies by Harazi from Yazd and Haghhighizadeh from Ahvaz. This finding suggests that the youth needs premarital cognition to find the required criteria for starting family successfully along with understanding, but this cognition must be acquired through guidance by family (22). Failing to care about answering the questions can be a restriction in this study and it is recommended that the studies be done on the criteria of choosing a right partner from the point of view of non-medical students and non-students and the results related to the criteria be compared between the students majoring in medicine, and the other fields; on the other hand between the students and non-students. Based on the above findings, we can conclude that the students participating in this study consider some psychological and social criteria for choosing a partner and it suggests that the students know the sustainable criteria for partner choosing, so we should provide opportunity to prevent from problems of choosing based on these criteria, so we should invest on educating loyal, good-tempered, committed to the social and ethical principles, accountable and compatible individual. As these traits are shaped in family and society, they should pay attention to them and acculturation should be done.

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Authors' Contributions

Ansari Niaki Mehri: study conception, design, and writing the article. Ahadi Fatemeh: study conception. Bagherzadeh Ali: study design, data collection. Ghorbani Raheb: data analysis.

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