

Sexual Frequency and Happiness of Marriage

Samantha Blose

SOCI 4308.002

## **Introduction**

Many people get married and many people are unhappy in their marriages and get divorced. Young people dream of getting married, and to be happy in their marriage, but what makes people happy in their marriage? Does sexual frequency have an effect on happiness in marriage? Finding a relationship between sexual frequency and happiness in marriage would benefit many, those looking to get married, those already married and those in a struggling marriage. The research proposal is see if there is an association between sexual frequency and marital happiness, in men and women, and in different age groups.

## **Literature review**

Studies have been done in regards to the frequency of sexual activity and happiness in a person's marriage.(Yucel and Gassanov, 2010) These studies have identified a couple's satisfaction, and how often they have sexual intercourse. Some of them have found positive relationships, some found none, and some negative. With sexual intercourse being such a large part of marriages and relationships, finding what the relationship is can be a large indicator of how important it really is, or it will show us that sex is not important. Finding such information would be able to help us have an idea of what people look for in a marriage and how to keep people happy and satisfied within their marriages.

In a study by Galinsky and Waite in 2014, they studied sexual frequency and marital quality. They found a positive relationship, when sexual frequency increases marital quality; also the same when sexual frequency is reduced marital quality is worsened. I found other studies with similar findings to this, such as Kornrich, Brines and Leupp 2013. Now that does not mean all studies I reviewed had the same findings. One study found that there was

very weak, practically no relationship between sexual frequency and happiness (Loewenstein, Krishnamurti, Kopsic, and McDonald, 2015). It is very important to review both studies that are for and against your hypotheses, you want to make sure your other sources are not biased in some way, and it is good to compare what the studies did differently.

The study which found no relationship between sexual frequency and marital happiness stated that they found a relationship between the quality of the sex not the frequency of it. (Loewenstein et al. 2015) They also reported that there was a decreased mood in those who had increased sexual activity, but the increased sexual activity has no effect of that. Along with that they found couples who were married for a longer period of time reported having more sex. This little bit of information could be beneficial, because this study for a relationship in it, I may be to use that in my study and look to see if I am able to find a relationship between years married, marital happiness and sexual frequency. Although this study does not go along with my hypotheses it is important to having information on both sides.

One study reviewed found a positive relationship between marital happiness and sexual frequency, they also found sexual frequency is related happiness in general and in marriages, but more then it come to women. (Elmslie and Tebaldi, 2014) This study being done being up in interesting topic of do males or females happiness benefit more from having more sex. As stated before having sex is an important part of an intimate relationship, research has found that married couples have more sex than single couples, and when one is unable to have sex they have decreased happiness. (Schwartz and Young, 2009) As stated

above the important of sexual frequency differs in sexes, but some research shows that it also differs for different age groups. It is found that the older you are the more likely you are to be sexually satisfied, which leads to you being satisfied in your relationship. (Fisher, Donahue, Long, Heiman, Rosen and Sand 2014)

My proposed study is to view the data set and see if there is a relationship between sexual frequency and marital happiness. With doing my research I will be adding to the other studies that have been done on this subject. This will give another piece of literature that will show a relationship between the sexual frequency and martial happiness. The studies I reviewed have been looking at either no specifics, or just one, and I plan on looking at different aspects, like sex and age. With viewing both of these other variables my data will be adding an extra layer of depth, and seeing if those other factors may cause for a larger or smaller relationship. The ultimate goal of doing this is to find a relationship, and be able to share this information with the public and help those in struggling marriages or just to make their happiness within their marriage better.

When looking at the different studies side by side you can see their positives and their negatives. All of the studies I reviewed were cross sectional, except the one which found no relationship (Loewenstein et al. 2015). There is definitely a benefit to using longitudinal studies, you are studying the group over time which allows you to see change. That does not mean that the other four studies were cross sectional are invalid. With the cross sectional you are still doing the research, you just do not follow it any further, you don't do a follow up in a few years, it is just research done at one point in time. As I stated before some of the studies focused on gender (Elmslie and Tebaldi, 2014) you also have some that focused with

age, especially older couples (Fisher et al. 2013). Both of these are positives, they are going more in depth and looking at different factors which might make a larger relationship between sexual frequency and marital happiness. One study I looked at used the General Social Survey (GSS) which is the same data that I will be using for my study so I estimate that my findings will line up with them very closely with them due to this reason (Elmslie and Tebaldi, 2014). I do not know if this is a positive or a negative. It could be both, positive because it will be another study done on the topic, and using the same data set but from different years would show a different, at the same time, it would almost be like a repeat study.

After reviewing multiple pieces of literature I have proposed three hypotheses. One of which is that there is a relationship between sexual frequency and marital happiness, when one increases so does the other. This hypothesis came from that the majority of my findings were constant with this proposed hypothesis is that women's happiness in their marriage increases more with sexual frequency. The next hypothesis I propose is that as a person ages their marital happiness increases which also increases their sexual frequency. Many of the studies I reviewed had older couples, which drew me to have this hypothesis. The last hypothesis is that there is a difference in the relationship between sexual frequency and marital happiness when it comes to different genders.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The data used is the GSS 2014(General Social Survey) it is designed to be representative of the United States population, and has been used to examine social trends. The total number of case in the GSS is 2538; the sample size used in this research project is 1002. The sample that will be used is the number of people who are married and answered the sexual frequency question. Since the group of people I am focused on is strictly married people, this will eliminate a lot of the cases.

## **Measures**

The two main variables I focused on are hapmar (DV) and sexfreq1(IV) which is a recode of sexfreq. Hapmar is happiness in marriage which is measured on a 3 point scale: very happy, pretty happy, and not too happy. The question is worded: Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage? Would you say that your marriage is very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy? Sexual frequency was asked, about how often did you have sex during the last 12 months? Sexfreq was originally coded: not at all, once or twice a year, once a month, 2-3 times a month, weekly, 2-3 times a week, and 4 or more times a week. This variable was recoded to: twice or less a year, once a month, 2-3 times a month, weekly and 2 or more times a week. This was recoded in this way due to the small number of participants who fell into some of those categories. Recoding this variable in this way will allow us to make a better observation of the relationship between sexual frequency and marital happiness. Along with those two variables, the sex and age variable were also used. Sex variable is coded male and female. The original age variable was a continuous variable, but due to reasons of how I was going to analyze the data I chose to recode into age1, which

makes it into an ordinal variable. The new groups for age1 are 0-20, 21-40, 41-60, 61-80 and 81+.

The two key variables are sexfreq and hapmar, both of these are ordinal variables which will allow me to run a chi-square for my analysis. Running a chi-square will show me the number of participants which fall into each group and show whether there is a relationship between sexual frequency and marital happiness. To run the actual data I will be using SPSS. In SPSS for a chi-square a cross tab will be used. It will show if there is a relationship between my two key variables. Running just these two variables will answer my first hypothesis. For the other two hypothesis which one incorporates the sex variable and the other incorporates the age1 variable, I will be running a cross tab with sexfreq and hapmar but also adding a layer variable to see if there is a relationship dependent on sex or age. The layer variable will be able to break down results of the original chi-square and pull it into different groups. For sex it will be able to show me if the results are significant or not significant for male or female respondents. It will be able to do the same for age; it will break down the original chi-square and break it down into the recoded age1 groups.

## **Results**

The descriptive statistics for all the variables used are in Table 1. The two main variables used are sexual frequency and happiness in marriage. I used those two variables to see if there was a relationship, and if sexual frequency affects the happiness in your marriage. Of people who took answered the GSS our sample of people who are married and answered the sexual frequency question is 1002. From those 1002, 60% of them felt they

were very happy in their marriage, 36% pretty happy and 4% not too happy. When it came to sexual frequency, 20% people responded with twice or less in a year, 15% once a month, 21% two or three times a month, 21% weekly, and 23% two or more times a week. The data was split 51% female and 49% male. Along with sexual frequency, marital happiness and gender I used age as a variable. The sample is 31% 21-40 year olds, 43% 41-60 year olds, 22% 61-80 year olds, 3% 81 and up year olds.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of study variables (n=1,002)

| <b>Variables</b>                                  | <b>Proportion</b> |
|---|-------------------|
| Happiness of<br>Marriage                          |                   |
| Very Happy  | .60               |
| Pretty Happy                                      | .36               |
| Not Too Happy                                     | .04               |
| Recode of Sexual<br>Frequency in the<br>past year |                   |
| Twice or Less in<br>a Year                        | .20               |
| Once a Month                                      | .15               |



|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| 2-3 Times a<br>Month | .21 |
| Weekly               | .21 |
| 2+ times a week      | .23 |
| Recode of Age        |     |
| 21-40                | .31 |
| 41-60                | .43 |
| 61-80                | .22 |
| 81+                  | .03 |
| Female               | .51 |
| Male                 | .49 |

Running of the chi-square, crosstab in SPSS, shows the true relationship between these variables. There is an association between marital happiness and sexual frequency ( $p=.000$ ). This association was found at a 95% confidence interval. Sexual frequency does play a role in a person's marital happiness. When running the crosstab with the layer variable, it came apparent that this association is only found in women ( $p=.000$ ), with men ( $p=.068$ ) there is not an association between sexual frequency and marital happiness. This means that the association found between sexual frequency and marital happiness is strongly driven by the female population. Also when it came to age, there is an association, but that association between sexual frequency and marital happiness diminishes as age increases; 21-40 ( $p=.000$ ), 41-60 ( $p=.000$ ), 61-80 ( $p=.007$ ) 81+ ( $p=.480$ ).

From these results, I reject the null hypothesis of the first hypothesis. There is a significant relationship between sexual frequency and marital happiness, and a person's marital happiness is dependent on their sexual frequency. The second hypothesis proposed I fail to reject the null, the research done showed that with age sexual frequency had no association with marital happiness. The last hypothesis I reject the null, there is a difference between men and women when it comes to marital happiness being dependent on your marital happiness.

## **Conclusion**

Research done on things which effect marital happiness will always be relevant. These finding are able to again show us that there is a relationship between marital happiness and sexual frequency, not only this but that it is way stronger for women, and as age increases the relationship does as well. Although I was able to find out that marital happiness is dependent on your sexual frequency, a limitation of chi-square is that you are unable to see the direction, so I am unaware if the relationship is a positive or a negative, all I know it that it exists and that there is not a relationship for men, and for older people. This is very unfortunate but knowing that your marital happiness is dependent on your sexual frequency is still a useful piece of research. It would be useful to know this information so you could exactly tell whether a person should have sex more or less frequent to be happier in their marriage.

If this study is done again a way to improve results would be to find a way to find the direction of the relationship so a person can get more information out of it. Other studies

took data from couple's questionnaires and had multiple sources of their information. This seemed to help them seem to find more specifics about sexual frequency and marital happiness that would be another thing to be done differently if this study is done again.(Witherow, Chandraiah, Seals and Bugan, 2015) Overall the research done will contribute to the overall research on the relationship between sexual frequency and marital happiness, and how the relationship varies for gender and for different age groups.

## References

- Elmslie, Bruce and Edinaldo Tebaldi. 2014. "The Determinants of Marital Happiness." *Applied Economics* 46(28):3452–62.
- Fisher, William A. et al. 2014. "Individual And Partner Correlates of Sexual Satisfaction and Relationship Happiness in Midlife Couples: Dyadic Analysis of the International Survey of Relationships." *Arch Sex Behav Archives of Sexual Behavior* 44(6):1609–20.
- Galinsky, A. M. and L. J. Waite. 2014. "Sexual Activity And Psychological Health As Mediators of the Relationship Between Physical Health and Marital Quality." *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 482–92.
- Karraker, A., J. Delamater, and C. R. Schwartz. 2011. "Sexual Frequency Decline From Midlife To Later Life." *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 502–12.
- Kornrich, S., J. Brines, and K. Leupp. 2013. "Egalitarianism, Housework, And Sexual Frequency in Marriage." *American Sociological Review* 78(1):26–50.
- Schwartz, Pepper and Linda Young. 2009. "Sexual Satisfaction in Committed Relationships." *Sex Res Soc Policy Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 6(1):1–17.

Wetherow, Marta Parkanyi, Shambhavi Chandraiah, Samantha R. Seals, and Antal Bugan. 2015. "Relational Intimacy And Sexual Frequency: A Correlation or a Cause? A Clinical Study of Heterosexual Married Women." *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 1–10.

Yucel, Deniz and Margaret A. Gassanov. 2010. "Exploring Actor and Partner Correlates of Sexual Satisfaction among Married Couples." *Social Science Research* 39(5):725–38.