

## DYADIC ADJUSTING IN CONJUGAL RELATION: ASSESSMENT OF WELL-BEING IN MARRIAGE

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### ABSTRACT:

This study aimed to discuss the employ of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) to the evaluation of marital relationship, based on the investigation of correlations between the dimensions: cohesion, consensus, satisfaction and expression of affection. The scale was administered to a convenience sample and non-probabilistic 106 people married for  $16.11 \pm 11.35$  years. Data show that all areas of the scale were moderately correlated with one another, although the stepwise multivariate analysis indicated that only dyadic cohesion was directly associated with the dyadic consensus and expression of affection. This finding confirms the adequacy of the scale to measure not only of dyadic adjustment, but also of marital relationship. It was suggested the possibility of using other instruments related to assess individual dimensions of satisfaction with the spouse.

**Key words:** marriage; conjugal status; evaluation; scales.

### INTRODUCTION

Conjugal life has been aimed by researches in different knowledgeable areas such as Psychology, Social Sciences, Anthropology besides in the health area mainly in Public Health and Family Health. In such areas, it has been debated the overvaluing of a healthy life<sup>1-3</sup> which implies among other factors to enjoy a harmonious conjugal life under impacts not only on raising kids but also in family development<sup>4-5</sup>.

Therefore, conjugality has demonstrated to be a healthy factor to the couple besides to the family, being highlighted as a protective factor to organic diseases and mental disorders, including source of key social support against stressing events. Some studies<sup>6-7</sup> portrait parents' conjugality, value transmissions and practices through generations as possible factors which may contribute both to children's well-being and complex question understanding rooted in psychosocial problems, e.g. aggressive behavior also violence against women. Such implications can cooperate with prevention strategic planning and health enhancement<sup>8</sup> on understanding family relation dynamics which include conjugal affective living.

Either conjugal relation or conjugal identity can be defined as the partner's individual entangling which originate the building of the couple's identity, an intersubjective space continuously transformed by both parties from conjugal living<sup>9</sup>. Even under a psychoanalytic view, nowadays, it has also been investigated with measuring tools as a way to identify the phenomenon crossed with other dimensions, such as the psychological well-being<sup>10</sup>, straightly linked with family health<sup>6</sup> improvement strategies.

In this scenario, some tools have been developed and tested as the Parents' Conjugal Questionnaire<sup>11</sup>. This tool allows verifying how parents' conjugality is organized by the dyad (couple) along with how it has been noticed by sons and daughters. To assess conjugality does not mean to measure the couple's satisfaction rate toward marriage. Studies reveal such an assessment should approach a series of factors, for instance conjugal interaction, conjugal solution making, couple union meaning, its effect on each other's life, faced troubles on conjugal building, moreover maintenance among other relevant aspects<sup>12-17</sup>.

International scientific literature suggests that conjugal dimension can be understood in terms of conjugal adjusting concept<sup>18</sup>, a notion related with

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adjusting, communication, happiness, integration along with satisfaction of the couple's members<sup>19</sup>. Aiming to study the conjugal adjusting e.g. dyadic adjusting, it has been largely applied DAS - Dyadic Adjusting Scale, that is in Portuguese EAD - *Escala de Ajustamento Diádico* developed by Spanier<sup>18</sup>. There are several implications to define conjugal adjusting being the most relevant one the assumption a process may be better investigated along the way. Cross-sectional study application on adjusting investigation has some value, although obviously a process can be better observed through longitudinal designs<sup>19</sup>.

DAS scale has already been suited to several countries including cultures<sup>16</sup>. In Brazil, it has been used in researches which assess conjugal satisfaction<sup>19-21</sup>. In the original study<sup>18</sup>, internal found consistency has revealed Cronbach Alfa in 0.90 (dyadic consensus), 0.94 (dyadic satisfaction), 0.86 (dyadic cohesion) and 0.73 (affection display). The scale assessment study to the Brazilian context<sup>18</sup>, using 542 married subjects, internal found consistency levels to full DAS along with its subscales were similar to the previous studies<sup>22-23</sup>, e.g. they have been ranked in a scale from reasonable to very good.

DAS had its first confirmatory factor analysis in 1982, in which it was discovered a solution to four factors which explain 94% covariance among the items. Cronbach Alfa ratio to full scale was 0.91. The scale is comprised of the following dimensions: (a) Dyadic consensus: it assesses the level of the couple's agreement sense on several basic questions concerning the relation, such as: financial, leisure, religious, friendships, conventionality, life approach among others; (b) Dyadic satisfaction: it assesses the sense of divorce debatable questions, going out after couple's quarrel, marriage regret, mutual bickering, well-being, confidence in the partner among others<sup>19</sup>; (c) Dyadic cohesion: it examines the couple's emotional sharing sense; (d) Affection dyadic display: it assesses the couple's agreement sense on affection expression, sexual relations, lack of love including sex refusal<sup>19</sup>.

Taking into account scale components, dyadic consensus is related to perspective and ideas sharing which point out to key marriage dimensions. It is also related to the couple's agreement on assumed behavior facing values and social rulings, carrier organization moreover household tasks; added to that it is related to a variety of aspects of conjugal life which drive to several adapting conditions through which the person may be exposed in the marriage<sup>18-19</sup>. Such a concept embraces family questions, social conventions, ways of treating birth family, goals, aims and important values, time spent together by the couple, carrier decisions which implies in a certain agreement level so as not to produce tension along with marriage discontent.

Dyad satisfaction dimension refers to direct sense of conjugal satisfaction, i.e. how the partner

sees marriage, also the presence of either some factors or conjugal behavior which turns it satisfactorily or not<sup>17</sup>. Such an assessment and perception are performed nowadays in a conflictual way, mainly due to the transition phase furthermore individual privilege over relational and collective. On the other hand, such a sense is amplified by a growing and continuous equity process among men and women at least on the speech expressed level. Therefore, even if such an assessment looks on a greater thinking possibility, on marriage questionings and the partner roles; it also reveals how each partner perceives and experiences conjugal relation. Nowadays, it is noted that such a domain is related to the meaningful way of conjugal satisfaction dominion what can happen due to consistent existence between scales and the very definition of the constructs.

Related to the conjugality domain of cohesion, it is understood as a feeling, union sharing along with integration among the partners. It embraces questions such as extra familial involvement in activities together, frequency on exchanging ideas about some object and frequency on working together in any project. When there is any cohesion weakening it can be either due to external factors, such as commitments, working hours, carrier planning or internal ones<sup>17-19</sup>. Cohesion means closeness and feeling of connection as well as intimacy perceived by the couple; there is a shared feeling with the relationship and its continuity resulting in a relation preservation feeling and bond in a way to minimize the influence of others into the conjugal relation. In traditional marriages the woman is still responsible for the couple's cohesion maintenance, since she seems to adjust herself better to the husband manner including his subjective needs than the contrary<sup>17</sup>. Finally, the dimension known as affection expression is defined as a subjective concept on either agreement or disagreement of a couple in questions related to the way and frequency of care, affection added to sexual desire displays<sup>17</sup>.

In scientific literature, DAS factors – cohesion, consensus, dyadic satisfaction and affection display – have been largely approached in an individual manner in terms of either their psychometric properties or only as general measure components which assess the couple's adjusting. Forward to these considerations, this study aims to debate the use of DAS - Dyadic Adjustment Scale to assess conjugal construct from the investigations of correlations among dimensions which comprise the tool.

## METHODS

**Type of Study:** This is a descriptive, cross-sectional and correlational study.

**Subjects:** From the standpoint of demographic profile, this sample was comprised of

106 subjects, 53 heterosexual couples, who have been legally married for at least one year with or without kids. The marriage average was  $16.11 \pm 11.35$ . Subjects' age average was  $42 \pm 11$  years. Men's age average was 43.4 years old, in turn women's age average was 40.7. Subjects' number of kids was 1.49 children per subject with standard deviation of 1.22. Socioeconomic status, according to Abipeme criteria, demonstrates most subjects belong to B class (60.37%). Linked to the socioeconomic status per capita income was of 5.03 salaries with standard deviation of 3.63. Subjects' background knowledge revealed high education in the majority (66.98%) of the subjects observed both among men and women.

Concerning inclusion / exclusion criteria, it was not limited maximum duration for marriages, age, work, number of kids or socioeconomic status. Inclusion criteria was defined as to be consensually married for at least one year; not showing signs of cognitive or behavioral impairment plus not being in a conjugal separation process. In this study, it was studied the intradyad correlations i.e. degree of consensus among the members of the pair, otherwise answers displayed by married persons in an independent way.

**Data gathering:** Subjects were selected by the snowball technique in which new subjects are appointed by the respondents from the researcher's contacts. After being informed of the research, subjects have signed an Agreement of Free and Informed Consent filling out questionnaires and scales. Tool application was performed individually, that is, although they were couples, each member has answered it without the other partner's presence. Another special caution to assure individual application was respondents did not have access to the partner's answers either answered tools or applied conversation, for instance, whatsoever could influence the responses. Thus, each partner application was performed in a sequential and independent manner. This study was approved by *Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa da Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras de Ribeirão Preto, Universidade de São Paulo* – Ethics Committee in Research of the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Languages of Ribeirão Preto, University of São Paulo, Process under no. 349/2007).

### Instruments

- (a) Social Demographic Questionnaire: developed by this survey authors addressed to the subject's identification and their socioeconomic and demographic status.
- (b) Abipeme Scale of Socioeconomic Status: Abipeme<sup>24</sup> criteria is a scale of socioeconomic status measured by weight applied to a group of items of

domestic comfort besides the head of the family background.

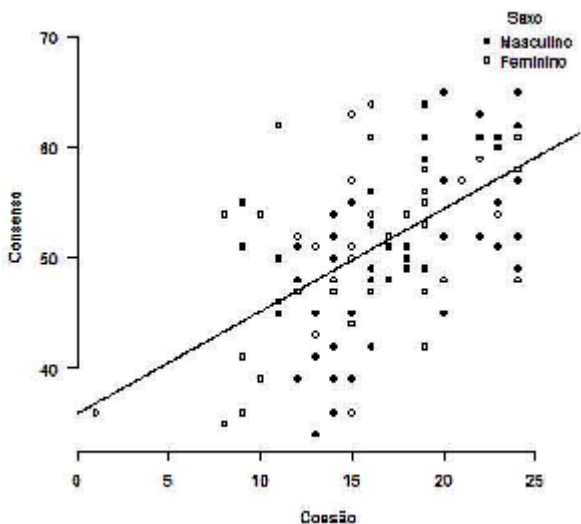
- (c) DAS - Dyadic Adjusting Scale: North American<sup>18</sup> scale developed to assess couple's perception concerning their affective relationships. A world - wide known tool has been suited to several countries and cultures.

**Databank Analysis:** Data obtained from applied tools were translated by SAS Software 9.2 along with classified by identification numbers by couple, sex hence by subjects. Correlations were calculated among continuous variables of the following domains: (a) consensus; (b) dyadic satisfaction; (c) cohesion; (d) affection display (a, b, c and d are dyadic adjusting domains according to DAS); (e) age; and (f) socioeconomic status. The magnitude of force of correlation factor was assessed according to the proposed procedure by Zou, Tuncali and Silverman<sup>25</sup>. Significance level was  $p < 0.05$ . After correlation definition, it was established total score relation of several domains from a multiple linear model in which all variables were taken into account. To set the final model, all variables (a, b, c, d, e, f) were submitted to the selection method of stepwise variables in which it remains in the model the ones which presented greater significant evidence from a multivariate standpoint. Adopting this method allowed to filter among all listing variables, the most predicted ones, once analyzing tools are suitable to examine and meet all interdependent relationship types<sup>26</sup>.

### RESULTS

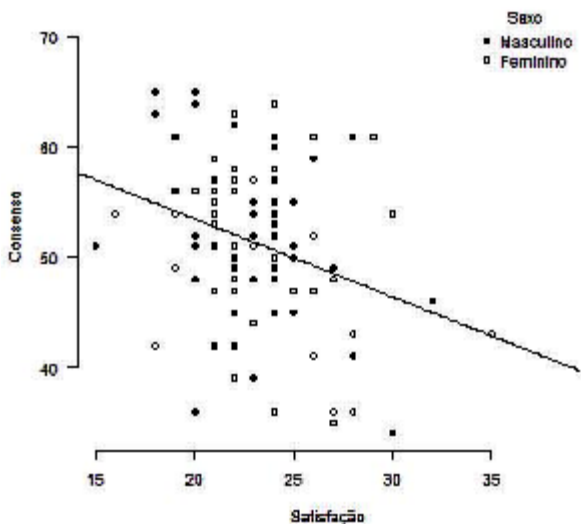
It was observed, correlating conjugality domains - consensus, cohesion, satisfaction and affection display - among themselves, it was observed they are all correlated ( $p < 0.05$ ) what confirm the studies traced back the creation of DAS, confirming the main hypothesis of this present study referring to the internal consistence of the construct in a compound sample of only married subjects. It is paramount to highlight in the previous study of validation for the Brazilian context, it was inserted persons who have been into any heterosexual loving relationship -marriage, dating, and extramarital affair - besides not necessarily living together.

However, through stepwise multiple regressions, when it is analyzed each of the conjugality variables related to the others of the same domain it was observed there was no significant correlation, other than the consensus straightly related to dyadic cohesion what can be seen in Figure 1. It is important to highlight the results i.e. correlations were organized by sex, though that is not a listed variable for analysis in this current study.



**Figure 1:** Correlation between consensus and dyadic cohesion in subjects of both sexes (N = 106)

Under a 106 married subject sample, it was verified consensus is negatively correlated with satisfaction (rho = -0.25; p < 0.05) (Figure 2), moreover positively correlated with cohesion (rho = 0.55; p < 0.05) and affection display (rho = 0.45; p < 0.05). By stepwise multiple regression analysis, it was verified consensus is directly related to dyadic cohesion<sup>27-28</sup>.



**Figure 2:** Correlation between dyadic consensus domains along with dyadic satisfaction in subjects of both sexes (N = 106)

In terms of multiple regression analysis (Table 1), it is necessary to consider consensus is largely related to cohesion e.g. cohesion represents a leading role over consensus, although the contrary has not been true. Consequently, cohesive couples have greater consensus level; however couples who experience large consensus are not always cohesive.

**Table 1:** Results of the adjusted regression model used in the stepwise variable selection method (N = 106)

Answer Variable*	Explaining Variables	Parameter Estimate	p-value
<b>Dyadic consensus</b>	<b>Cohesion</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>&lt; 0.01</b>
	Dyadic satisfaction	-0.35	0.07
<b>Dyadic satisfaction</b>	Age	-0.04	0.10
	Consensus	-0.07	0.13
<b>Dyadic consensus</b>	Consensus	0.11	0.06
	Affection display	0.43	0.08
	Married time	-0.05	0.10
<b>Affection display</b>	<b>Cohesion</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>0.04</b>
	Dyadic satisfaction	-0.07	0.13

\* Parameter estimate was defined by square minimum method (Least Mean Square Method). Results in bold letters are the most expressive ones in a statistical standpoint.

Consensus has not presented associations with age variables (rho = 0.01; p = 0.93), relationship time (rho = 0.10, p = 0.47); level of education (p = 0.90); socioeconomic status (p = 0.31); per capita income (rho = 0.05; p = 0.73).

Conjuality variable named dyadic satisfaction is negatively correlated with only consensus domain. It cannot be associated with cohesion domains (rho = -0.13; p = 0.18) and affection display (rho = -0.14; p = 0.16), what flows in the opposite direction to the one emphasized by the tool creator, that is, those domains are significantly correlated<sup>18</sup>. By the stepwise multiple regression analysis, dyadic satisfaction does not seem to receive influences from any DAS measured conjuality dimensions. Dyad satisfaction has not presented subjects' age associations (rho = -0.15; p = 0.12), couple's relationship time (rho = -0.17; p = 0.21), level of instruction (p = 0.13), socioeconomic status (p = 0.11) and per capita income (rho = 0.08; p = 0.59).

In the current study, cohesion is positively correlated to affection display (rho = 0.47; p < 0.01). This correlation is considered moderate<sup>25</sup>.

By the multiple regressions, analysis cohesion does not receive significant influence of any conjuality domains. Also according to this analysis, affection display is directly and meaningfully influenced by dyadic cohesion what increases the hypothesis of an entanglement among DAS domains.

**DISCUSSION**

This study showed DAS factors are correlated among themselves pursuant to what has been observed in other studies<sup>21-22</sup>, however strong correlations have not been met. The most significant ones were consensus and cohesion besides consensus and affection display. Dyadic satisfaction presented negatively correlation with consensus.

Literature support has not been found out to base this finding. In turn, the finding is opposite to what has been revealed by researchers of the Spanier researching team<sup>18</sup>. Stepwise analysis indicated satisfaction is not provoked by any conjugality domain what raises the need to list either other constructs or variables which may be associated to the dyadic satisfaction. Previous study has discovered associations between satisfaction with subjective well-being domain<sup>16</sup>.

Another consideration to be emphasized is that dyadic consensus<sup>17-19</sup>, since it implies in certain couple's agreement level against tension and marriage discontent; it can be used as a conjugal relation quality index. Married persons with greater dyadic consensus tend to have a more harmonious life under fewer conflicts what implies in happiness, though it allows to think in adapting strategies furthermore flexibility in questions which may bring disagreements. Thus, relevant association between consensus and cohesion empower to affirm that when there is higher consensus such as agreement and flexibility the couple tends to keep themselves cohesive, i.e. bound; they can adopt similar attitudes without divergences related to the marriage.

Pursuant to the stepwise multiple regression analysis, consensus was kept significantly related to cohesion, in short, it plays a prevailing role over consensus. On the contrary, the opposite has not seemed true. Hence, married persons with relationship cohesion tend to have larger consensus but married persons who experience greater consensus are not always cohesive. We can assume that a good degree of agreement within a variety of marriage aspects do not imply necessarily neither in union, that is cohesion between partners nor conjugal happiness<sup>17-18</sup>.

The findings suggest that conjugal dimensions evaluated by the tool may have an independent approach as if they were four conjugality constructs, for instance. Therefore the couples could be assessed only either through dyadic satisfaction or affection display depending on the study target.

Another alternative which may be considered from obtained data in this current study is to measure conjugality from the integration of two or more factors which present strong correlations. As an example of that to assess consensus and cohesion together as there is close association between these factors. Since dyadic cohesion has shown to be one of the closest factors associated with consensus in the survey sample, it is possible to contemplate both factors in an integrated view. Such an approach does not disregard isolated factor

analysis, albeit it has been understood as an additional resource to perceive the factors which potentially lead to satisfactorily relationships.

In addition, it points out to the fact that conjugality domains are largely centered on the dyad assessment, on how each one experiences certain marriage aspects; on the other hand, other constructs like conjugal satisfaction take into account beyond conjugal integration the way each one evaluates the partner in terms of either emotional or structural attributes. In other words, each partner evaluates these aspects present in the other what reveals the conjugal satisfaction construct measures not only the domain linked to the dyad but also the partner on an individual basis, whereas conjugality, on the view of DAS measured dyadic adjusting, focuses on how the couple interact their couple identity e. g. their conjugality.

Suitable assessment of satisfaction achieved by the dyadic relationship shall come accompanied by good indexes of the partners' adaptation, proposing conjugality must be investigated not only in terms of either the relation or the perception of it, but also each partner's expressed aspects. So, assessing conjugality it means uniquely to evaluate the context into which the partners are inserted, their personalities including their sense over their own life on an individual basis.

The analyzed findings have demonstrated couples with larger dyadic consensus direct a more harmonious conjugal life aside from having fewer conflicts to the extent that they are able to identify themselves with the needs of their partners. This does not assume necessarily happiness, understood as conjugal satisfaction; otherwise it takes to consider the use of adaptive strategies in solution-making based on flexibility when facing situations which may foment disagreements. Such strategies could be articulated to promote family well-being into de conjugal domain minimizing the risks of disagreements which lead to divorce as strategies to dysfunctional conflict solving such as conjugal violence. Mentioned evidences suggest future studies shall investigate how relation maladaptive aspects could be fixed, favoring new conjugal resilience strategies which may allow couple's agreement added to consequent satisfaction enhancement aiming couple's health.

Considering the presented results there are evidences DAS is a suitable tool to conjugality measurement apart from enabling additional approaches; it does not simply supply a general measure yet it stands out the associations among factors as a relevant aspect within conjugal relationship understanding.

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