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## PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH

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### Effects of Family, Type of Personality and Perfectionism on Spouse Selection

Azam Movahedi

Department of Psychology of Payame Nour University, South Center Branch, Tehran, Iran.

\*For reprint and all correspondence: Azam Movahedi, MA. Department of Psychology of Payame Nour University, South Center Branch, Tehran, Iran.

Email: leonoreh@gmail.com,

#### ABSTRACT

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<b>Received</b>	24 December 2014
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<b>Introduction</b>	The median age of marriage has raised and its rate has declined in recent years. A suitable spouse is one of the main concerns of everyone's life, which could be affected by family, personality and society effects on taste and interest of people. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between personality, family and society on spouse selection criteria among college students.
<b>Methods</b>	In this cross-sectional study, 250 college students in both gender and study levels were randomly selected. Students were asked to answer validated questionnaires on spouse selection. The obtained data were analyzed by appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical methods using computer software.
<b>Results</b>	Results showed that family education has positive significant correlation with education ( $R^2=0.42$ , $p<0.05$ ), religion ( $R^2=0.51$ , $p<0.05$ ), culture ( $R^2=0.38$ , $p<0.05$ ), and manner ( $R^2=0.53$ , $p<0.05$ ) criteria in both genders, while no correlation was found between family's education and either economic ( $R^2=0.02$ , $p<0.05$ ) or physical criteria ( $R^2=0.1$ , $p<0.05$ ). In addition, male students had significantly higher rate of perfectionism than females ( $p<0.05$ ). Girls' priority was good ethical personality, behavioral characteristics, religious beliefs, financial status, education, and beauty respectively, while similarly with minor differences, male priority in spouse selection was good ethical personality, behavioral characteristics, religious beliefs, beauty, education level, and financial situation. The financial situation of girls for men in this study could indicate not only the importance of economic problems in our society, but also greedy wishes, which have been created in recent decades.
<b>Conclusions</b>	According to the present study, family and society have more influence than personality on mate selection.
<b>Keywords</b>	Perfectionism - Type "A" Personality - Spouse selection - APS - MMPI.

### INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, marriage or spouse selection is one of the most important concerns of any person's life. Marriage has been one of the most important social institutions or even the greatest and most essential of all institutions in human society since ancient times<sup>1</sup>. Marriage affects on various scopes of life, including physical health and longevity, mental health and happiness, and economic well-being<sup>2</sup>. Marriage is possibly the most studied social tie<sup>3</sup>. Studies have shown that marital history over the life course forms a range of health consequences, including cardiovascular disease, chronic conditions, mobility limitations, self-rated health, and depressive symptoms<sup>4</sup>. It affects not only different aspects of personal health but also has an undeniable effect on the social health of any community<sup>5</sup>. For example, social ties reduce mortality risk among adults with documented medical situations. It is shown that among adults with coronary artery disease, who were socially isolated had a risk of subsequent cardiac death 2.4 times higher than their more socially connected peers<sup>6</sup>. Marital status was also related to tobacco, cannabis, and cocaine use<sup>7</sup>. It has shown that marriage is generally protective against suicide<sup>8-10</sup>. Likewise, many of our behavior and actions, spouse selection could be affected by many factors like personality, family and society.

Theorists interested in marriage and romantic relationship development have suggested that similarity plays a key role in the process of mate selection and surely, personality is the first item in this theory. Personality refers to individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving<sup>11</sup>. In other words, it can be defined as consistency in a person's way of being in long-term regularity in their certain ways of perceiving, thinking, acting and reacting as a person<sup>12</sup>. The importance of personality in human life has been recognized and shown since the Greek physicians Hippocrates (460-370 BC), and Galen (129-200 AD)<sup>13</sup>. The ancient Greek classified personality of people based on the four humors, which is an effect of an excess of one of the four bodily fluids. For them, the excess level of fluids determined a person's character. The four humors included choleric (yellow bile), melancholic (black bile), sanguine (blood) and phlegmatic (phlegm)<sup>13</sup>. Long time later, other scientists explained different classification of personality and this issue has not been closed yet. In 1950s, two cardiologists Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman, after a long study of healthy men between the ages of 35 and 59, developed a new classification of personality as titled type A and B. They found "Type A" behavior doubles the risk of coronary heart disease in otherwise healthy individuals<sup>14</sup>. Based on this theory, individuals with "Type A" personality is ambitious, rigidly organized, highly status-

conscious, sensitive, and impatient<sup>15</sup>. Studies have illustrated that personality type has great influence in all aspects of human life. Moreover, another issue, which come across and could have positive as well as negative effect, is perfectionism. Perfectionism is a personality trait described by a person's motivation for flawlessness and setting extremely high performance standards, along with a highly critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, even though the personality of each person could be different even among twins, it also could be affected by different factors and by passing the time personality might be reshaped. Studies have shown that family and society are two important factors, which always can interfere with personal decisions and shape the manners<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, a combination of such a personality with socio-family factors might affect spouse selection as well. Unfortunately, based on both national and global centers, marriage rates are near their lowest levels in history<sup>18</sup>.

Like other developing countries, Iran is passing its transient stage from tradition to modernity, on the other hand transition from tradition and eastern life style to western life style has made social changes in all social aspects such as marriage and choosing spouse. By changing the traditional trend, change in the girls' expectations due to their higher education, employment achievements in one side, and increased cost of housing on another side, the marriage age has been increased in Iran. Increased statistics of divorcement and reduced number of annual marriages has caused main concerns in the society. Due to the importance of personality as well as family and society effects on marriage, in the present study, college students desire on spouse selection have been examined. This study also aimed to see the importance of perfectionism and "Type A" personality in spouse selection as well as their relationship with family and society affects.

### METHODS

As average age of the first marriage in many countries, including Iran, is in 20s, in this cross-sectional study, students of one of the main branches of Islamic Azad University were considered as the study population with approval of ethical research committee of the university. The number of students recruited for the present study was calculated based on the Krejcie and Morgan sample size formula for known population<sup>19</sup>. Among students who were interested to participate in this study, 250 single students, with no background of marriage, were selected by simple random selection. Likes and dislikes in many things, including marriage could be different based on gender. Therefore, to have a better conclusion, 125 student of each gender were chosen in this

study. After signing the consent form to participate in this study, they have been asked to fill questionnaires. In this research, Ahvaz Perfectionism Scale (APS), which has been previously created and validated for Iranian population by Najarian<sup>20</sup> *et al* and has been extensively used since 1999, was used to measure perfectionism. APS was created based on Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), Maudsley Obsessive-Compulsive Inventory (MOCI), and Irrational Beliefs Test (IBT). This questionnaire is a self-report scale consists of 27 items. The items of this scale have 4 alternatives ranging from Never, Seldom, Sometimes, and Often. Except for items 11, 16, 17, and 23, which get scores in reverse method, the rest of items are scored according to 1, 2, 3, 4 amounts and total score of APS is 76. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale is 0.90, which shows its high reliability.

A spouse selection questionnaire was created and validated by the author. It contains 100 questions, including demographic information of students such as age, gender, education, birth rank, household dimension, and a collection of questions about qualifications for spouse selection. Qualifications for spouse selecting covered five different areas of personal interests including financial and economic situation, educational and cultural situation, religious believes, beauty and physical properties, manner and behavioral characters, and not mentioned items (other) in 87 questions. 16 out of 87 questions were gender based, and students were filled their suitable questionnaire based on their genders. Scoring of the spouse preferences of this questionnaire has 5 alternatives ranging from "none", "low", "average", "high", and "very high" which scored

with "0", "1", "2", "3" and "4" respectively. Total score of this questionnaire was 435, and person who scored above 218 was considered as person with high perfectionism view for spouse selection. For evaluating the validity of author-made spouse selection questionnaire, a pilot study on 30 students of both genders has been done. The reliability of this questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The Cronbach's alpha value of 71 questions, which was common for both genders, was 0.95 and 0.94 for male and female respectively. For 16 gender-based questions, value was 0.88 and 0.87 for male and female respectively, which showed high consistency in the validation scale of the questionnaire. Demographic variables as well as type of personality and perfectionism were considered as independent variables while spouse selection was considered as dependent variable in this study. The results of the two groups of male and female students were compared on using independent sample t-test. Relationship between variables was examined using the Pearson's correlations. Multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to examine predictors of both personality and perfectionism with spouse selection.

**RESULTS**

The average age of female and male students was 24.18±4.49 and 24.62±4.36 years, respectively, and no significant difference between genders was noticed. As Table 1 shows, even though significantly higher academic degree was found among male parents, most of the student's parents had bachelor degree. No significant difference was observed in educational degrees of student's siblings.

**Table 1** Comparison of educational degrees frequency of parents and siblings of students in both gender.

Relative	Diploma & less		P	Bachelor		P	Master & above		P
	Female (%)	Male (%)		Female (%)	Male (%)		Female (%)	Male (%)	
Father	52.0	45.6	0.14	30.4	24.8	0.09	17.6 <sup>a</sup>	29.6 <sup>a</sup>	0.01
Mother	74.4	61.6	0.05	21.6	24.0	0.16	4.0 <sup>a</sup>	14.4 <sup>a</sup>	0.01
Sisters	42.3	36.3	0.12	47.7	48.7	0.71	9.9	15.0	0.09
Brothers	31.6	35.2	0.12	58.2	54.9	0.13	10.2	9.9	0.87

No significant differences was found concerning family income in both gender (p=0.34). As Table 2 shows, although in female parents' point of views, both financial status and

educational level were relatively important as a spouse selection, surprisingly, this factor showed higher importance among parents of male students.

**Table 2** Comparison of the degree of importance of financial and educational factors in spouse selection based on the family's point of view of students.

Factors	Important		P	Relatively important		P	Unimportant		P
	Male (%)	Female (%)		Male (%)	Female (%)		Male (%)	Female (%)	
Financial	40.8	17.6	0.01	36.8	54.4	0.02	22.4	28	0.08
Educational	67.2	52	0.04	25.6	40.8	0.02	7.2	7.2	-

## Spouse selection

Based on the author made questionnaire of spouse selection, the present results revealed that both male and female students had a significantly perfectionism point of view in spouse selection (for male:  $p=0.012$ , for female:  $p=0.016$ ). As Table 3 illustrated, male students showed significantly

higher perfectionism than female students based on APS test. On the contrary, significantly higher rate of Type A personality was observed among female students as compared to male students ( $p=0.04$ ), while non-Type A personality was significantly higher among male students ( $p=0.04$ ).

**Table 3** Comparison of perfectionism and type of personality frequency among different genders of students.

Personality	Male (%)	Female (%)	P
Perfectionist	52	35.2	0.03
Non- Perfectionist	48	64.8	0.03
Type A	64	76.8	0.04
Non-Type A	36	23.2	0.04

According to the results of this study, as indicated in Table 4, there is a significant difference between females and males based on economic, religious believe and beauty factors as spouse selection criteria. No significant difference was observed for

educational and cultural situation as well as manner and behavioral properties between both groups, but there was a significant difference between within groups of both genders ( $p=0.01$ ).

**Table 4** Frequency of different point of views of students in the importance of main factors for spouse selection.

Gender	Important		P	Less important		P
	Males (%)	Females (%)		Males (%)	Females (%)	
Financial and economic situation	90.4	74.4	0.03	25.6	9.6	0.03
Educational and cultural situation	82.4	76	0.11	24	17.6	0.09
Religious believes	97.6	87.2	0.04	12.8	2.4	0.03
Beauty and physical properties	52.8	80	0.01	20	47.2	0.01
Manner and behavioral characters	100	98.4	0.91	1.6	0.0	0.93
Other	40	48	0.07	52	60	0.08

As indicated in Tables 5 and 6, this study failed to find any significant relationship between perfectionism and the main factors for spouse

selection as well as personality type "A" with above-mentioned factors in both males and females.

**Table 5** Correlation and Regression between main factors in spouse selection with perfectionism based on different genders.

Variable	Female							Male						
	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	R <sup>2</sup>	F	B	t	P	OR	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	R <sup>2</sup>	F	B	t	p	OR
Financial & economic situation	0.013	0.0	0.02	0.901	0.141	0.888	1.096	-0.123	0.015	1.898	0.8	-1.378	0.171	0.563
Educational & cultural situation	-0.011	0.0	0.016	0.827	-0.125	0.901	0.940	0.015	0.0	0.028	0.767	-0.166	0.868	0.932
Religious believes	0.006	0.0	0.005	0.975	0.068	0.946	1.089	-0.033	0.001	0.131	0.883	-0.362	0.718	0.822
Beauty & physical properties	0.126	0.016	1.998	0.481	1.414	0.160	1.710	0.08	0.006	0.794	0.767	0.891	0.375	1.494
Manner & behavioral characters	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	0.133	0.018	2.206	0.967	1.485	0.14	0.0
Other	0.15	0.023	2.848	0.346	1.688	0.094	1.893	-0.103	0.011	1.308	0.533	-1.144	0.255	0.662
Total Score	0.141	0.020	2.508	0.864	1.584	0.116	3.3	0.071	0.005	0.620	0.900	0.788	0.432	1.694

\* Lack of any correlation was due to 100% similarity in answers.

**Table 6** Correlation and Regression between main factors in spouse selection with Type “A” personality in different genders.

Variable	Female							Male						
	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	R <sup>2</sup>	F	B	t	p	OR	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	R <sup>2</sup>	F	B	t	p	OR
Financial & economic situation	0.014	0.0	0.024	0.897	0.154	0.878	1.115	0.057	0.003	0.394	0.711	0.628	0.531	1.304
Educational & cultural situation	-0.005	0.0	0.003	0.828	0.057	0.994	0.968	-0.031	0.001	0.120	0.778	0.346	0.730	0.857
Religious believes	0.038	0.001	0.175	0.966	0.418	0.677	1.679	0.012	0.0	0.018	0.867	0.133	0.895	1.077
Beauty & physical properties	0.064	0.004	0.507	0.568	0.712	0.478	0.736	-0.083	0.007	0.860	0.844	0.927	0.356	0.635
Manner & behavioral characters	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	-0.096	0.009	1.135	1.00	1.066	0.289	0.0
Other	-0.132	0.009	2.166	0.517	1.472	0.144	0.536	-0.113	0.005	1.603	0.556	1.266	0.208	0.622
Total Score	-0.001	0.0	0.0	0.897	0.011	0.991	0.992	0.025	0.001	0.074	0.911	0.273	0.786	1.203

\* Lack of any correlation was due to 100% similarity in answers

## DISCUSSION

Marriage is an important issue, which affects public health in both mentally and indirectly physically as well. The dropping of the marriage rate in the last decade has become a vital concern for many countries including Iran. It is literally impossible to blame one factor for this worldwide problem. Like many other issues, it is a multi-factorial problem and a few of reasons might be blamed for this situation. Usually, both financial status and to some extent educational level of grooms had been always important factors in marriage especially for girls and their parents. Surprisingly, in the present study significantly higher rate of these two interests were observed among family of boys. In traditional society, usually they prefer to have higher levels of education for boys, but in Iran, it seems for a few reasons this phenomena has been changed. First of all most of the Iranian college students are girl and based on the latest reports, more than 60% of college students are female<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, increasing of age of marriage makes girls and their parents to be worried and show more leniency. On the other hand, economic situation also has become a big dam in front of boys for marriage and affected their point of views. The easiest solution for them would be a girl who already has a supportive economic situation. Therefore, in the present study no correlation and regression were found between financial situation and perfectionism or type of personality. This finding is along with global trend. For instance, in western communities like America, significant difference in the view of men during past 40 years has changed<sup>22</sup>. Increased

luxury orientation in the society during past decades as well as various economic pressures due to global inflation<sup>23</sup> and more importantly, boosting consumerism culture, has caused living costs to be increased in the society and this required cooperation of members of the family to cope the living costs.

In the present study, the importance of education for both groups, besides increased social level of educated people might be due to financial issues as well. Girls with higher education have a better chance to have a job with higher salary, which is a great temptation for both parents and their sons.

According to the current study, even though higher perfectionism among boys, type “A” personality was found higher among girls. The present results are similar to findings of Chew & Chong Chee-Leong (1991), which has been conducted on 290 people of master students of the National University of Singapore, and girls has indicated significantly higher rate of type “A” personality as compared to boys<sup>25</sup>. Despite the similarity of the present results with study of Behpajouh *et al* (2008) on 100 female and 103 male students in Iran, it was in contrast with study of Masson *et al.* (2004), on Belgian students. That study was conducted on 268 boys and 348 girls of Universtie de Liege, using the Test for Ability to Study and Evaluation (TASTE) and Multidimensional Perfection Scale (MPS). They found girls indicated higher percentage of perfectionism<sup>24</sup>. This difference might be due to the dissimilarity in the type of questionnaires in Masson study comparing with the current one.

## Spouse selection

The present study also failed to find any correlation between perfectionism or type of personality and spouse selection criteria in both genders. It might be to results of spouse selection, which both genders showed high level of expectations. This finding is similar to the results obtained from similar studies by Gyuris *et al* (2005) that they did not find any correlation between selecting the spouse and personality type<sup>26</sup>. The insignificant relation between personality and spouse selection might be due to possible less compatibility of the questionnaires with Iranian population. The author-made spouse selection questionnaire was considered specifically for Iranians, while personality type questionnaire was based on western standards, which can effect on the correlations. Therefore, it is possible that the current questionnaires in different cultures would not be practical.

More than half of the population in both girls and boys interested to have all the criteria for their future spouse. A similar study conducted by Botwin *et al.* (1997) on 118 non-married boys and girls and 216 couples conducted in California State, USA. According to their findings, factors such as social situation and acceptability, personal nature and its reciprocal affection for selecting the spouse are very important<sup>27</sup>. Although, in this study, there was not indicated any significant difference in the importance of social situation between girls and boys, in the study by Botwin, the girls considered it more importantly. Beside the cultural difference of Iranians and Americans, it can be resulted from an interval for more than one decade of these two studies. In the study by Regan and Berscheid (1997), US girls have not considered significant importance for the social and economic situation of their future spouse<sup>28</sup>. This difference in outcomes of studies might be resulted from social difference. Presence of free and open relations in USA directed them for having the living partner who had better perception and interest from him<sup>28</sup>.

Iran has been considered generally as a religious country. Based on the current study, religion as well as manner & behavioral characters were two important factors for spouse selection in both genders. Results of this study was supported by previous studies<sup>29</sup>. Belief and religion is the most necessary element and must be considered when selecting the spouse, because couples will live with each other through their whole life, therefore they will be influenced by beliefs, thoughts and ethics of each other. The importance of religion and fidelity to the religious beliefs may be studied by several dimensions. First, it is mostly believed that people who have religious and fidelity are more tender and logic to deal with them because of their divine piety. On the other hand, decency, purity and chastity are inseparable part of religiousness, for this reason, religious people,

whether girls and boys, have more chastity than faithless people do. Even in the western countries, religion is accounted as one of the factors keeping the family and a barrier against ill-fated marriages<sup>30</sup>. Although, most physical properties of a spouse, such as beauty are important, they play less role after a while. For example, beauty may be lost after years by aging, but good morality is effective until the end of life.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on this study, family and society have more influence than personality on spouse selection. Financial status still plays an undeniable role in spouse selection and sadly, it has become an important issue for male too. In order to overcome the dropping rate of marriage which can massively affects both personal and public health, cultural view should be modified at the society level. Instead of optimistic dreams for marriage, both parents and youth should think more rationally and humbly toward each other.

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