

Trends in the Correlation between Current? Does Marriage Become Better with Time Length of Marriage and Marital Satisfaction

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Abstract: *This research compares marital satisfaction – composed of marital quality, stability, and intimacy - between young couples with young children, and senior couples with adult children. The study's aim is to examine whether marital satisfaction continues to follow a U-curve albeit new phenomena which are to be found in younger generations, such as marriage in more mature ages. The sample comprised 68 young couples and 69 senior couples; four questionnaires were used – a demographic questionnaire, and three questionnaires examining intimacy, marital stability, and marital quality. The results show a general trend of higher quality and stability among senior couples, according to the traditional U-curve. However, the young couples in the study showed different marital patterns from those described in the literature, most significantly - higher levels of intimacy, which may be the result of marriage in more mature ages.*

Previous studies show that marital satisfaction tends to resemble a U-shaped curve over the years - high in the first years of marriage, a sharp decline with the children's birth, and then it rises again after the children leave home (Gorchoff, John & Helson 2008; Levenson, Carstensen & Gottman, 1993). Our study examines whether marital satisfaction continues to follow the same patterns, in light of the changes which characterize newer generations, such as marriage at later ages. We compared marital satisfaction in young and senior married couples, using three variables - marital quality, stability, and intimacy, in an attempt to understand what happens in a marriage with the passage of time. Our study is based on the family life cycle model by Carter and McGoldrick (1989), focusing on two stages - stage 3, the transition to parenthood, and families with young children, and stage 6, families with adult children who have already left the house.

1. BACKGROUND

The family life cycle is the basic concept in the developmental theory; this cycle is defined as a system of predictable stages, and in each stage the family is characterized by a different structure is (Minuchin, 1974). Although several models have been suggested, we will focus on the 6-stage model created by Carter and McGoldrick (1989), and especially on stages 3 through 6. Each stage in this model is characterized by unique, challenging tasks; failure in handling each stage may bring about a crisis. The stages are as follows:

Stage 1 – single young adults: includes the challenge of maturing towards adulthood, leaving the parents' home and transitioning to an independent life, coping with differentiation from family of origin, and finding a partner.

Stage 2 – the creation of a new family: includes the formation of a romantic relationship and marriage, dealing with compromise and concession, and connecting with the partner's family of origin.

Stage 3 – family with young children: includes the reception of a new member into the system, and coping with the ensuing violation of the couple's equilibrium.

Stage 4 – family with adolescent children: includes renegotiation with the children regarding issues of independence and boundary setting, coping with elderly parents that might suffer from health problems, and handling the mid-life crisis.

Stage 5 – the emptying nest (children leaving the house): includes dealing with separation from the children, retirement from work and re-litigation of the marital system.

Stage 6 – family with adult children: includes coping with old age and health problems.

1.1. Length of Marriage and Marital Satisfaction

Various studies (Boden, Fischer & Niehuis, 2009; Kapinus & Johnson, 2003) indicate that the correlation between length of marriage and marital satisfaction is a U-shaped curve, passing through the milestones of the stages mentioned earlier by Carter and McGoldrick (1989); satisfaction from marriage is high during the first years, then sharply declines during the first decade of marriage with the birth of the first children, reaches its lowest when the children reach adolescence, and then gradually rises again when the children leave the house and the couple reaches retirement (Hirschberger, Sanjay, Marsh, Cowan & Cowan, 2009; Gorchoff, John & Helson, 2008; Levenson, Carstensen & Gottman, 1993).

1.2. Length of Marriage and Intimacy

Several studies point to the fact that intimacy is very important to the success of marriage, such as Doss, Simpson, and Christensen's (2004) study which found that a deprivation in emotional intimacy was among the most prominent factors leading couples to counseling. Another research, comprising both satisfied and unsatisfied couples, found that 96% of satisfied couples reported that they feel comfortable sharing their emotions with their partners, while 72% of unsatisfied couples reported that their partners did not know how they felt (Olson & Olson, 2000).

Researchers point to mixed trends regarding satisfaction and the degree of sexual functioning in older ages. On the one hand, some researchers report a decrease of interest in sex with ageing (Edwards & Booth, 1999), a decline in sexual activity (Ade-Ridder, 1990) and a lack of sexual activity that includes penetration due to sexual or health problems (Hinchliff & Gott, 2004). On the other hand, other researchers report an improvement - Neugebauer-Visano (1995) found that a couple's sexual relationship in a long term marriage improved with time, while the love and affection between the partners intensified; similarly Gorchoff, John, and Helson (2008), and Levenson, Carstensen, and Gottman (1993) have shown an actual increase in marital satisfaction during the fifth stage, while Deeks and McCabe (2001) found that menopause had no effect on the degree of interest in sexual activity.

Some researchers relate the decline in sexual activity to the various manifestations of menopause. Birnbaum, Cohen, and Vertheimer (2007) mention as well that the myth according to which menopause marks the end of women's sexuality was found to be far from the truth. Instead they point to the marriage length as the variable which affects sexuality above all, and claim that this is why women in their 50's who enter a new relationship with a new man are as enthusiastic and sexually desiring and active as women in their 20's and 30's.

Intimacy is not only one of the most important factors for marital success; it is also one of the most vulnerable in a romantic relationship over the years. With time, emotional expression within the sexual context decreases. Birnbaum, Cohen, and Vertheimer (2007) claim that courting and emotional expression are extremely important for women; their findings show that although women of all ages are sensitive to how emotionally invested their partner is in them, with time, as romance and courtship slowly diminish, it becomes even more significant. One of the explanations for emotional and sexual intimacy becoming more important to senior couples can be found in Carstensen's socioemotional selectivity theory (1991). According to Carstensen, people in older ages tend to cut back their social relationships, and to get emotionally closer in their significant relationships. Based on this theory, we may assume that with the decrease of social contacts, intimate marital relationships become a central source of social contact in older ages. However, according to Hinchliff and Gott (2004), the decline in the sexual relationship's quality has a minimal effect on marital quality in long term marriages. The researchers describe different ways in which older married couples adjust to the decrease in the quality of their sexual life, such as increasing general physical contact (like cuddling, touching, and embracing), and spending more time together on a daily basis.

1.3. Intimacy and Gender

Studies that examined different aspects of intimacy among men and women, found that in general women presented higher scores for intimacy in its various dimensions compared to men. Lerner and Karabenick (1974) found that among eighteen "masculine" qualities, the most quintessential was "cool-headedness"; and among the eighteen "feminine" qualities, the most archetypical was "expressing feelings openly", a crucial quality for establishing intimacy. Ziv (1984) found similar results examining an Israeli sample. Several researchers assume that young women have a romantic

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ideal of intimacy because they undergo a cultural socialization process which teaches them to highly appreciate intimacy and closeness (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1997; Gilligan, 1982, as cited by Knobloch-Fedders & Knudson, 2009).

Differences between men and women were found in the factors affecting sexual satisfaction - women's satisfaction is dependent on their expectations regarding sex, while men experience sexual satisfaction according to their physical pleasure (McNulty & Fisher, 2008, as cited by Warehime & Bass, 2008). The length of the marriage appears to affect women's sexual satisfaction more than men's - Pederson and Blekesaune (2003, as cited by Warehime & Bass, 2008) found that women who are engaged in a long term relationship report higher sexual satisfaction than that reported by men in long term relationships.

1.4. Marital Satisfaction among Young Couples

The transition to parenthood has a great impact on the marital relationship, and generally lowers marital satisfaction and quality. With the birth of their children, couples encounter high levels of stress and task overload, factors that decrease the level of marital satisfaction. The birth of a new child means more tasks, responsibilities, and further limitations on the couple's independence. The findings of Levy-Shiff's (1994) study, which determines which personality and environmental factors may predict changes in the marriage during the transition to parenthood, indicate that this transition entails a decrease in marital satisfaction, especially among women. The most significant predictors for both partners were found to be the level of the father's involvement in child care, and his relationship with his children - the higher his involvement, the lesser the decline in marital satisfaction upon transition. Levy-Shiff (1994) proposes that a considerable part of feelings of anger and dissatisfaction appearing among women upon the transition to parenthood, stems from the burden of household tasks that falls solely on their shoulders. Fathers who are highly involved alleviate this burden, and help clear more free time for mutual recreation, thus increasing the degree of closeness and understanding between the spouses. Marcus and Doron (1988) explain the decline in the relationship's quality and in satisfaction during the first three years after marriage, by means of the shattering of the illusions and ideals the partners held prior to their marriage, and of the entry of new daily elements into their relationship. According to Carlson (2007), the birth of the first child entails a decrease in the amount of positive contact between spouses, and an increase in the amount of conflicts stemming from the strains of adjustment to the role of parenting, which requires a lot of responsibility and consumes large amounts of time, resources, and energy. The results of Lavee, Sharlin and Katz's research (1996) suggest that the number of children living in the house has a direct effect on the level of distress experienced by the parents, and an indirect effect on the parents' relationship. However, the children's ages were found to have no effect (Lavee, Sharlin & Katz, 1996). According to Pacey (2004), many couples are very pleased with the birth of their first child, but this pleasure is accompanied by a decline in shared recreation, sex and attention. At this point the dyadic relationship of the couple is threatened which may bring about crisis and even divorce. Carter and McGoldrick (1989) mention that most divorces take place after two years of marriage and between the ages of 25-34.

1.5. Marital Satisfaction among Senior Couples

As the "nest" empties, parenthood related strains are reduced, and the couple are able to direct more time to their relationship, thus increasing satisfaction (Gorchoff, John & Helson, 2008; Levenson, Carstensen & Gottman, 1993). Orbuch, House, Mero and Webster (1996) found a correlation between higher levels of marital satisfaction in the later stages of marriage, and the reduction in parental responsibilities and work hours. The importance of the reduction in parenthood related stress is illustrated by the fact that when adult children return to live at home or continue to be dependent upon their parents, parents' satisfaction is impaired and they experience more stress (Greenberg & Becker, 1988). Gorchoff, John, and Helson (2008) conducted a thorough longitudinal research comprising 100 women, and found that at age 61, after all the children have left the house, women reported an improvement in their marriage as a result of the quality time they could now spend with their husbands. Part of the women were married for the second time, and some reported that their satisfaction was related to finding a compatible partner after divorce. However, the study showed that overall the levels of satisfaction and contentment among women who lived with their partner for many years, were significantly higher than among those who had new partners.

This study aims to compare the following dimensions between young and senior couples: intimacy, quality, and stability of marriage,

2. METHOD

2.1. Sample

2.1.1. Young Couples

The average age of the young couples' sample was 36.2 (range 24-57, Sd=5.3); couples were married an average of 7.2 years (range 2-14 years, Sd=2.7), and had at least one child.

2.1.2. Senior Couples

The average age among the senior couples' sample was 70.8 (range 57-81, Sd=5.7); couples were married for an average of 40.3 years (range 21-58 years, Sd=8.1).

Table 1 presents the demographic variables for the sample.

Table1. Demographic characteristics of the research sample

	Young Couples (n=68)		Senior couples (n=69)	
	N	%	N	%
Country of birth				
Israel	47	69.1	37	53.6
Asia	2	2.9	6	8.7
Western Europe	12	17.6	23	33.3
Place of Residence				
City	39	57.4	28	40.6
Kibbutz/Communal settlement	26	38.2	38	55.1
Village	2	2.9	2	2.9
Education				
Less than 12 years	2	2.9	7	10.1
Secondary school	13	19.1	33	47.8
Academic	53	77.9	29	42.0
Religion				
Jew	65	95.6	65	94.2
Other	3	4.4	4	5.8
Religiosity				
secular	57	83.8	57	82.6
Religious	10	14.7	11	15.9
Familial Status				
First marriage	66	97.1	58	84.1
Second marriage	2	2.9	10	14.5
Gender				
Male	32	47.1	32	46.4
Female	36	52.9	37	53.6
No. of children				
One child	31	45.6	2	2.9
Two children	31	45.6	15	21.7
Three children	5	7.4	32	46.4
Four children or more	1	1.5	19	27.5

- Demographic questionnaire – the demographic questionnaire included the following variables: age, length of marriage, first/second marriage, number of children, religious and degree of religiosity, country of birth, and education
- Intimacy questionnaire – based on the couple intimacy questionnaire composed by Sharabany (1974); the measure was validated by Risenfeld (1996). The questionnaire comprises 32 items representing the eight dimensions of intimacy in romantic relationships as described by Sharabany (1996):
 - Honesty and spontaneity – this dimension refers to the degree to which the partners are open and honest to each other, and to themselves.
 - Habituation, familiarity, and feeling – the degree to which the partners are familiar with each other
 - Connection, contact, and closeness

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- Exclusiveness and privacy – the degree to which the couple seek to be together, and extent to which one partner prefers his spouse above any other person.
- Giving, helping and sharing – the degree to which each partner expresses emotional support and tends to provide instrumental help to the other.
- Taking and receiving help – the extent to which each partner accepts help and feels free to ask for help or advice from the other
- Shared activity – the extent to which the spouses spend time together
- Trust and fidelity – the degree to which each partner trusts the other, and keeps his own promises

The items are rated on a 1-7 Likert scale, in which 1 indicates the lowest level of intimacy and 7 indicates the highest level of intimacy. For each subject a total grade was calculated as the average of his ratings for all the items in each dimension. A high grade indicates high intimacy and a low grade indicates low intimacy.

- Stability questionnaire – The Marital Instability Index (MII) was developed by Booth, Johnson & Edwards (1983). This tool measures to what degree each partner has considered ending his or her marriage. This is measured across three dimensions: emotional, cognitive, and practical. Reported reliability was $\alpha=.93$. Reliability for the short version was: $\alpha=.075$. Internal consistency for the questionnaire in the present study was $\alpha=.915$. For each subject a weighted grade was calculated as the average rating for all the items. The lower the grade, the higher the marital stability.
- Marital quality questionnaire – the Israeli scale for quality of marriage (I-MQS, Lavee, 1995) was based on the American tool ENRICH (Olson, Fournier & Druckman, 1986) and its shortened version (Fowers & Olson, 1992). In its original version, the questionnaire is composed of 125 items measuring the quality of marriage, i.e. – the degree of satisfaction, accordance and compatibility between partners – in ten dimensions: spouse's qualities, communication, conflict resolution, money and economics, interest and leisure, sexuality, parenthood, relation with friends and families of origin, role division and religion. Ten additional items in the original scale served as a global scale of marital quality, which constituted the basis for the shortened version (Fowers & Olson, 1992). The Hebrew version contains 95 items. Each item was rated on a 5 point Likert scale (ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"). The marriage quality scale was found to be highly reliable and valid, both in its original form (Fowers & Olson, 1989; Larsen & Olson, 1989; McCubbin et al., 1985) and in its Hebrew form (Lavee, 1995; Weiss, 1995). In the present research some items were reversed. Internal consistency of items in this study was: .845.

2.2. Procedure

Sample was a convenience sample, i.e. each of the research team applied to close friends and to married couples most accessible to him, asking both partners to fill the questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed in closed envelopes so as to award a sense of anonymity. Participants were asked to fill the questionnaires with no help from their partners.

3. FINDINGS

Table2. *T-test between young and veteran couples for the variables of intimacy, stability and quality of marriage.*

Measure	(68=n) selpuoc gnuoY		nareteV (69=n) selpuoc		t value	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Quality	5.45	0.83	5.54	1.05	0.609-	0.271
Stability	1.39	0.65	1.27	5.1	1.204	0.115
Honesty and spontaneity	6.16	0.77	5.83	1.02	2.109*	0.018
Habituation, familiarity and feeling	6.10	0.72	5.92	0.94	1.222	0.112
Connection, contact and closeness	6.25	0.82	6.07	0.87	1.242	0.108
Exclusiveness and privacy	5.27	0.99	4.90	1.02	2.14*	0.017
Giving, helping and sharing	6.12	0.72	5.93	0.86	1.35	0.089
Taking and receiving help	6.13	0.80	5.71	1.06	2.62**	0.005
Shared activity	5.42	0.86	4.86	1.24	3.027**	0.001
Trust and fidelity	6.09	0.80	6.19	0.85	-0.643	0.260

Table 2 presents the results of t-test analysis between senior couples and young couples for the variables of intimacy, stability and quality of marriage.

3.1. H1: Quality of Marriage among Senior and Young Couples

In order to examine hypothesis 1, we conducted a t-test for independent samples between quality of marriage among young and senior couples. T-test was found non-significant ($p > .05$), indicating that hypothesis 1 was refuted. Without statistical significance, however, quality of marriage grades among senior couples was higher than among young couples.

3.2. H2: Stability of Marriage among Senior and Young Couples

A t-test for independent samples was conducted in order to compare stability of marriage among young and senior couples. T-test was found non-significant ($p > .05$), meaning that hypothesis 2 was refuted. Stability grades among senior couples, without statistical significance, were lower than among young couples (measure being reversed, indicating higher stability among seniors).

3.3. H3: Level of Intimacy among Senior and Young Couples

T-tests for independent samples were conducted in order to compare levels of intimacy (in each of eight dimensions) between young and senior couples. Though t-tests were found significant, they pointed to an opposed trend to that hypothesized, meaning, levels of intimacy are higher among young couples than among senior couples. Significant differences were found in four dimensions of intimacy: honesty and spontaneity, exclusiveness and privacy, taking and receiving help, and shared activity. In all these factors, young couples scored higher than senior couples ($t = 2.109, p < .05$; $t = 2.14, p < .05$, $t = 2.62, p < .01$; $t = 3.027, p < .01$ respectively). In the remaining four dimensions of intimacy, no significant differences were found among young and senior couples.

3.4. H4: Correlation between Marital Stability and Level of Intimacy

In order to examine hypothesis H4, Pearson correlations were calculated among the research variables. Correlations are presented in table 3 below.

Table 3. Pearson correlations between marital quality, marital stability, and dimensions of intimacy

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ytilibatS	-									
ytilauQ	0.428**									
dna ytsenoH ytienatnops	0.283**	0.646**								
Habituation, familiarity and feeling	0.246**	0.463**	0.521**							
noitcennoC, dna tcatnoc ssenesolc	0.379**	0.627**	0.736**	0.532**						
ssenevisulcxE ycavirp dna	0.126	0.268**	0.451**	0.227**	0.382**					
Giving helping and sharing	0.339**	0.644**	0.681**	0.744**	0.718**	0.350**				
dna gnikaT pleh gniviecer	0.213**	0.489**	0.564**	0.515**	0.606**	0.306**	0.589**			
ytivitca derahS	0.194*	0.367**	0.546**	0.366**	0.467**	0.716**	0.515**	0.441**		
dna tsurT ytiledig	0.448**	0.565**	0.517**	0.560**	0.657**	*0.152	0.651*	0.493**	**	0.228
0.05 > p*	ot gniidrocca ,gnilacs desrever sti ot eud ytilibats fo snoitalerroc rof sraepa ngis (-) a :etoN									
0.01 > p**	ytilibats fo level rewol a setacidni edarg rehghih a hcihw									

Table 3 indicates that hypothesis 4 was affirmed almost completely, meaning, there are significant positive correlations between stability of marriage and most of the dimensions of intimacy (apart from the dimension 'privacy and exclusiveness', that showed no significant correlation with stability of marriage, $p > .05$). It can be claimed that the more stable the marriage, the higher the intimacy, by most of its dimensions.

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3.5. H5: Gender Differences in Marital Quality, Stability, and Intimacy

The hypothesis was almost fully refuted; the only significant difference that was found was the mutual activity dimension in the intimacy variable.

Table4. Differences between men and women in marital quality, stability, and intimacy

	Men (64=n)		Women (73=n)		T	P
	M	DS	M	DS		
ytilibatS	5.499	0.891	0.549	0.999	0.045	0.964
ytilauQ	1.284	0.546	1.370	0.621	0.858	0.392
ytienatnops dna ytsenoH	6.019	0.866	5.977	0.972	0.268	0.789
Habituation, familiarity and feeling	5.949	0.855	6.067	0.833	0.817	0.415
ssenesolc dna tcatnoc ,noitcennoC	6.052	0.920	6.253	0.775	1.389	0.167
ycavirp dna ssenevisulcxE	5.264	0.919	4.936	1.089	1.892	0.061
gnirahs dna gnipleh ,gniviG	6.031	0.833	6.024	0.774	0.053	0.958
pleh gniviecer dna gnikaT	5.859	0.957	5.972	0.974	0.684	0.495
ytivitca derahS	5.345	0.949	4.966	1.206	2.019*	0.046
ytilidif dna tsurT	6.101	0.822	6.183	0.621	0.576	0.566
0.05>p*						
0.01>p**						

3.6. Additional Findings

Differences in marital quality, stability, and intimacy were found between city and country dwellers.

Table5. Differences in marital quality, stability, and intimacy between the country and the city

	City (67=n)		Country (64=n)		T	P
	M	DS	M	DS		
ytilauQ	5.211	0.988	5.710	0.825	3.130**	0.002
ytilibatS	1.377	0.601	1.309	0.594	0.648	0.518
ytienatnops dna ytsenoH	5.904	0.930	6.039	0.929	0.830	0.408
Habituation, familiarity and feeling	5.926	0.887	6.083	0.812	1.053	0.294
ssenesolc dna tcatnoc ,noitcennoC	6.019	0.926	6.242	0.762	1.496	0.137
ycavirp dna ssenevisulcxE	5.294	0.786	4.812	1.180	2.738**	0.007
gnirahs dna gnipleh ,gniviG	5.871	0.849	6.130	0.737	1.854	0.066
pleh gniviecer dna gnikaT	5.776	0.939	6.015	1.005	1.412	0.160
ytivitca derahS	5.361	0.871	4.881	1.285	2.493*	0.014
ytilidif dna tsurT	5.944	0.946	6.311	0.668	2.574*	0.011
0.05>p*						
0.01>p**						

A significant difference in marital quality was found, showing that marital quality is higher in the country. No distinct differences were found in the stability variable. Differences were found in three dimensions of the intimacy variable: exclusiveness and privacy, and mutual activity was found to be higher among city residents, while trust and fidelity was found to be higher among country residents.

No differences in marital quality and stability were found between various education level groups. In the intimacy variable there was a difference in only one dimension - giving, helping, and sharing, in which those with an academic education received a higher score than those without an academic education.

3.7. Intervening Variables

A two-way ANOVA test was conducted for marital quality and stability according to length of marriage and gender.

Table6. Two-way ANOVA for marital quality and stability according to length of marriage and gender: means and standard deviations

		selpuoc gnuoY			selpuoc roineS			latoT		
		neM	nemoW	latoT	neM	nemoW	latoT	neM	nemoW	latoT
ytilauQ	M	5.25	5.61	5.44	5.73	5.37	5.54	5.49	5.49	5.49
	DS	0.74	0.87	0.82	0.97	1.10	1.05	0.89	0.99	0.94
ytilibatS	M	1.34	1.43	1.39	1.22	1.30	1.27	1.28	1.37	1.33
	DS	0.51	0.76	0.65	0.58	0.44	0.51	0.54	0.62	0.58

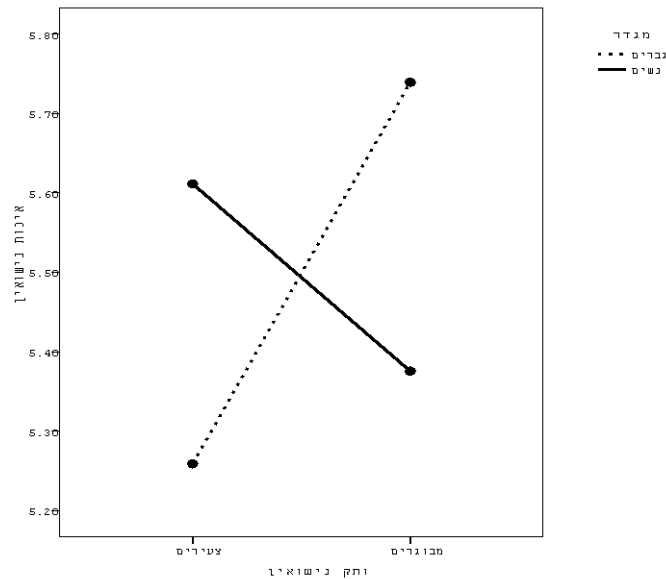
The stability scale was measured in reverse - the lower the score, the higher the marital stability.

Table 7. Two-way ANOVA for marital stability and quality according to gender and length of marriage: values of F and their distinctiveness

	egairram fo htgneL	redneG	redneG*egairram fo htgneL
ytilauQ	0.579	0.001	4.61*
ytilibatS	1.441	0.748	0.001

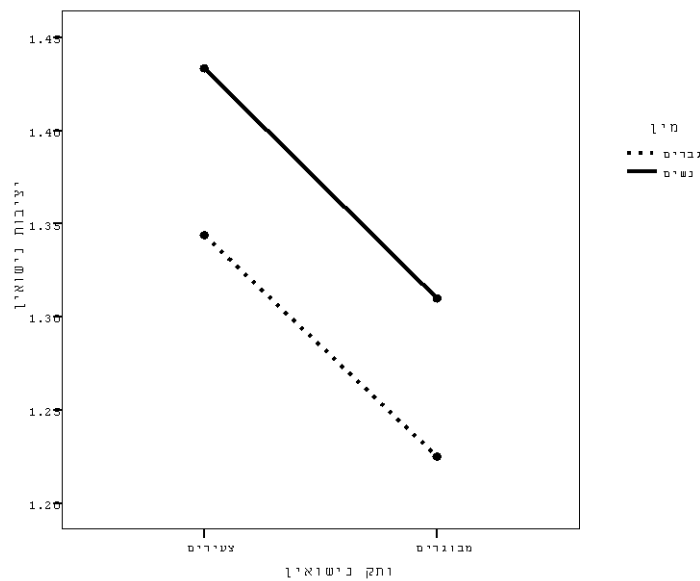
There is an interaction between length of marriage and gender. There is no main effect for length of marriage, and no main effect for gender.

Illustration 1. Two-way ANOVA for marital quality according to length of marriage and gender



The illustration shows that the longer the marriage, the higher the marital quality among men. Women show an opposite trend - the longer the marriage, the lower the marital quality.

Illustration 2. Two-way ANOVA for marital stability according to length of marriage and gender



The stability scale was measured in reverse - the lower the score is, the higher the marital stability. This illustration shows that marital stability is lower in younger ages, both in men and in women, and the longer the marriage, the more stable it is.

A two-way ANOVA was conducted for marital quality and stability according to length of marriage and place of residence.

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Table8. Two-way ANOVA for marital quality and stability according to length of marriage and place of residence: means and standard deviations

		selpuoc gnuoY			selpuoc roineS			latoT		
		ytiC	yrtnuoC	latoT	ytiC	yrtnuoC	latoT	ytiC	yrtnuoC	latoT
ytilauQ	M	5.15	5.82	5.42	5.29	5.63	5.48	5.21	5.71	5.45
	DS	0.80	0.71	0.83	1.20	0.89	1.04	0.98	0.82	0.94
ytilibatS	M	1.42	1.38	1.40	1.31	1.25	1.28	1.37	1.30	1.34
	DS	0.68	0.64	0.66	0.47	0.55	0.51	0.60	0.59	0.59

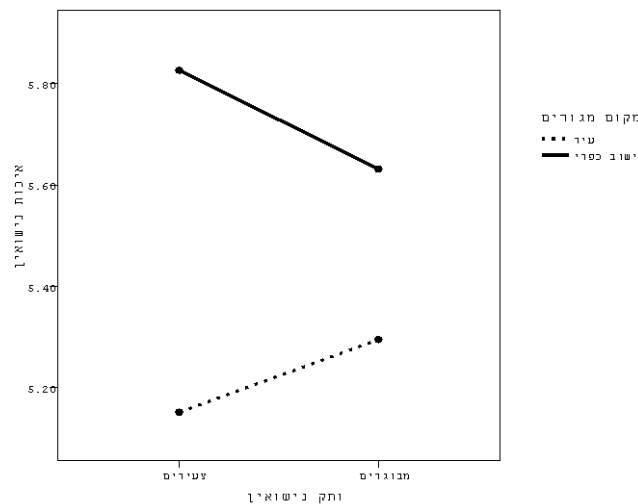
*The stability scale was measured in reverse - the lower the score, the higher the stability

Table9. Two-way ANOVA for marital stability and quality according to length of marriage and place of residence: values of F and their distinctiveness

	egairram fo htgneL	ecnediser fo ecalP	ecnediser fo ecalp * egairram fo htgneL
ytilauQ	0.025	9.672**	1.083
ytilibatS	1.171	0.197	0.012

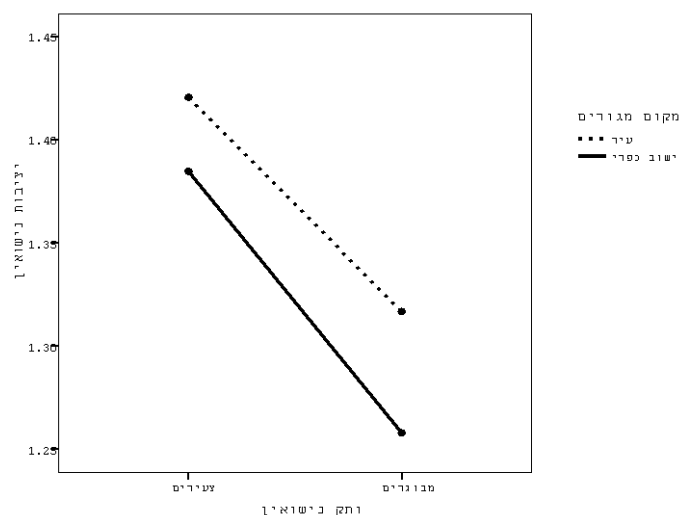
A main effect of place of residence was found; no main effect was found for length of marriage; no interaction was found between length of marriage and gender.

Illustration 3. Two-way ANOVA for marital quality according to length of marriage and place of residence



The illustration shows a trend whereof marital quality of younger couples is higher in the country than in the city. This trend decreases as the marriage length grows.

Illustration 4. Two-way ANOVA for marital stability according to length of marriage and place of residence



The illustration shows that marital stability is lower in younger couples who reside in both country and city, and it rises as the marriage lengthens.

4. DISCUSSION

In our study we've examined the correlation between marital satisfaction, measured using three variables (quality of marriage, stability and intimacy), and length of marriage. Based on former research and theory, we hypothesized that both quality, stability, and intimacy would be higher among senior couples than among young couples. Contrary to our hypotheses, we found no significant difference between young and senior couples in stability and quality of marriage; however, regarding the intimacy variable, our results indicated that young couples enjoy a higher level of intimacy upon half of the variable's dimensions, as opposed to our expectation. Only one dimension of intimacy (trust and fidelity) was higher among senior couples than among young couples, although this was not statistically significant.

The fact that no distinct difference in marital quality and stability was found between senior and young couples could be ascribed to a methodological reason, i.e. the procedure of our research, which was based on a relatively small, homogenous sample of an educated, secular and of middle socioeconomic class population. This notion is supported by former research that found that couples from lower socioeconomic status are characterized by a higher degree of economical dependency compared to couples from higher socioeconomic status (Previti & Amato, 2003), this fact may make divorce harder for the low status group. A larger and more comprehensive sample might have yielded more significant results towards our expected trend. Moreover, there is a possibility that the mere willingness of our subjects to participate in a study about marriage, constitutes an indication to apparently above average stability and quality of marriage.

Although it was not statistically significant, a general trend of higher quality and stability of marriage among senior couples was found. This finding affirms the evidence in the literature which shows that young couples with children have to cope with multiple stressors and overloads, which impair their quality of marriage. According to Carlson (2007), the first child's birth causes a decrease in the amount of positive contact between the spouses and an increase in the amount of conflicts stemming from stress. Among senior couples, on the other hand, the situation is different; according to Orbuch, House, Mero and Webster (1996), the diminishment of parental responsibilities and the decrease in work hours contribute to the quality of marriage. In addition the partners have more available time to spend together. Review of the literature reveals that the quality of marriage over the years corresponds to a U-shaped curve, meaning high quality during the first years of marriage, a sharp decline throughout the first decade with the establishment of the familial unit and the birth of the first children (Hirschberger, Sanjay, Marsh, Cowan & Cowan, 2009), reaching its lowest level with the children reaching adolescence, and gradually increasing when the children leave the house and with the spouses retirement (Gorchoff, John & Helson, 2008; Levenson, Carstensen & Gottman, 1993).

As opposed to the quality variable, the stability variable in the present study was not affected by intervening variables like place of residence and gender. This places the stability variable as the most invariant variable in the study, since it was consistently higher among senior couples than among young couples. In older ages, the level of dependency between the partners is strong both due to health issues and loneliness. Also, older aged individuals perceive their chances of finding new spouses as slimmer, than younger individuals. Another possible explanation for our finding that marital quality and stability rise over time, is that senior couples tend to see their relationship in a different manner than younger couples, they hold a wider perspective that was formed during a longer relationship. Senior couples examine and experience stability, intimacy and satisfaction from their marriage as an integration of all the different experiences they had undergone together throughout the years, and not simply in relation to the "here and now".

Regarding the intimacy variable, our research revealed that young couples scored higher than senior couples in four dimensions of intimacy (honesty and spontaneity; exclusiveness and privacy; taking and receiving help; and shared activity); one dimension was found to be higher, although not significantly, among senior couples (trust and fidelity). Therefore, our hypothesis was refuted, as we hypothesized that intimacy would be higher among senior couples. A possible explanation is that young couples are dealing with the experience of raising their children together, and building the foundation blocks of their intimacy. This stage in life requires cooperation and emotional sensitivity,

and may bring about stronger intimacy. Another explanation may be that young couples during the first years of their relationship, usually spend more time together in mutual activities; and indeed, the 'mutual activity' dimension was found to be higher among young couples than among senior ones. Furthermore, the honesty and spontaneity dimension was higher among the young couple group as well, and we suggest that in senior couples, with the passage of time the partners get used to each other, and this may lessen their need to tell each other everything; this could cause the spouses to drift further apart. One last possible explanation may lie in the fact that the average age of the young couples, was 36.2 years, which is relatively mature, and most of them have been married for a relatively short period of time. This reflects a current phenomenon of marrying in older ages due to the prolongation of the early adulthood stage of life, in which young people continue living at their parents' house, learn, travel and experience a protracted phase of bachelorhood. During this phase, young adults go through a process of personal development, therefore reaching the stage of marriage with a high degree of maturity, stability, and parental capability. The couples in our research reveal marital patterns and qualities different from those described in the literature as characterizing the young family stage, and it may be that their having entered marriage and parenthood with an already highly established level of emotional maturity, enables them to retain relatively high marital quality, stability, and high levels of intimacy.

Among senior couples the dimension of 'trust and fidelity' was found to be higher than among young couples. We suggest that along the years a sense of trust is established due to the fact that the relationship has been maintained for so many years and still exists. Additionally, the senior couple have come a long way together, they have grown together, and have overcome obstacles, which have developed their mutual sense of trust.

When we examined for differences in marital quality, stability, and intimacy between the genders, we found that older men are more satisfied with their marriage than younger men, while women, presented higher satisfaction among the young couples. This data contradicts the literature – which shows that women are more satisfied in their marriage as the partners reach retirement and there is more equality in the division of household tasks (Barnett & Baruch, 1987), while men are more satisfied in the earlier stages of the marriage, in which their wives take over the main share of household tasks and the caring for the children (Thompson & Walker, 1989).

However, we can observe an overall trend of increase in marital quality and stability over time, which is in line with the increase in satisfaction among men. It seems that the man's contentment with his marriage exerts more influence on the overall marital satisfaction than the woman's contentment. This might be accounted for by the fact that women are more inclined to work towards their husbands' satisfaction, therefore they themselves feel more satisfied when their husbands are.

It can be said that the fact that no significant differences were found between young and senior couples' marital stability and satisfaction, indicates an erosion of the distinction between the two groups. Nevertheless, many other factors may play a role in influencing the marital quality and stability, which are not necessarily related to length of marriage, such as: support from extended family, income, the spouses' physical and emotional state, and many others. An example from our findings is that both place of residence and gender serve as intervening variables in the correlation between length of marriage and marital quality.

4.1. Additional Findings

For young couples marital quality is significantly higher among couples living in the country than among urban couples, while for senior couples, this gap is less significant. One explanation for this finding may be that the country offers a higher quality of life in terms of the social circle and support for a young couple with children. Additionally, life in the country supplies the couple with close and accessible services such as kindergartens, mail, and supermarkets. Finally, it offers suitable conditions for children like nature, playing options and independency.

Among senior couples it was found that the difference between country life and urban life is very small and not significant. For individuals of older ages, there are more and more advantages to living in the city. Senior couples enjoy more free time due to the children's departure and retirement, time which they can spend in a variety of ways, such as to consume culture, such as opera, theater and the movies, facilities which are more easily accessible in the city, as well as to enjoy many and diverse

services located in proximity. Moreover, elements that were advantageous for young couples in the country may turn out to be burdens for older couples, such as taking care of a private house and a garden. These factors contribute to the fact that with the ageing of the partners, urban couples are more satisfied.

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