

# Comparing Attitudes toward Marriage and Spouse Selection Criteria among People on the Verge of First Marriage and Remarriage

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Due to the complexities and challenges of remarriage, the present study was conducted to compare attitudes toward marriage and spouse selection criteria among people on the verge of first marriage and remarriage.

**Method:** The present study was a causal-comparative survey. The statistical population of this study included all people on the verge of first marriage and remarriage referring to marriage registration offices and counseling centers in Shiraz, of which 112 people were elected during 2020 using the convenient sampling method. Participants completed the Braaten and Rosén's Martial Attitude Scale and Refahi et al.'s Selection Criteria Inventory. The data were analyzed using an independent t-test, for which SPSS22 was used.

**Results:** Findings revealed that there is no significant difference between people on the verge of marriage and remarriage in terms of attitudes toward marriage. In addition, among the spouse selection criteria, single people on the verge of marriage had a higher average than remarriage ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** According to the difference of people on the verge of first marriage and remarriage in terms of spouse selection criteria, in premarital counseling, it is better to consider the needs, conditions and criteria of each group separately.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Spouses, Marriage, Remarriage

## Introduction

Marriage is one of the most sacred human bonds which has been considered in most religions as a factor for the progress of every society [1]. A happy marriage is a key factor in promoting physical and mental health. However, sometimes not taking care of the marriage and neglecting its needs can lead to a failed marriage and can lead to negative consequences such as divorce in the family. Divorce is one of the most stressful events in people's lives, which affects their physical and mental health in different ways [2-3].

Despite the negative consequences of divorce on various aspects of life, divorced people, like other people who face other forms of loss, need to adapt to divorce and re-establish family life [4]. However, despite the important role of post-divorce adjustment in improving the mental health of divorced people, in some cultures, post-divorce adjustment and the idea of remarriage for divorced people, especially women, can be challenging. A previous study has [5] shown that remarriage is a multidimensional phenomenon with individual, economic, social, cultural and family challenges.

Because of the negative consequences of breaking up a relationship after divorce, divorced people may experience changes in their decision to remarry in some areas related to marriage, such as their attitudes toward marriage. It is defined as a person's general beliefs and feelings about romantic relationships [6]. One of the reasons for the importance of examining people's attitudes toward marriage is that positive or negative attitudes toward marriage affect commitment, investment, and satisfaction in future relationships [6]. Attitudes toward marriage and the criteria for choosing a spouse not only affect the quality of the first marriage but also some research has shown that unrealistic expectations and attitudes and unpreparedness for remarriage reduce the quality of remarriage by exacerbating mismatched priorities [7]. An overview of related research shows that incompatibility between marriage expectations and marriage achievements is one of the main causes of couples' dissatisfaction with their marriage that can shake the foundations of their marriage [8].

In examining the reasons for the success of marriages, researchers have shown that successful marriages are those in which the criteria for choosing a spouse are properly observed and the parties themselves have a clear knowledge and definition of the criteria [9]. Criteria for spouse selecting is a process that includes examination and evaluation of the characteristics and status of the future spouse in terms of various aspects such as physical characteristics, income, socio-economic status, level of education, job status, family status, etc. so that a set of these characteristics shape the behavior of choosing a spouse [10]. Regarding the importance of knowing the criteria for marriage, researchers believe that marriages that take place without considering the spouse selection criteria are less satisfying. For this purpose, a set of knowledge and information is necessary to improve the quality of marriage [11]. In other words, to strengthen marriages, the parties must set appropriate criteria for choosing a spouse and to examine individual characteristics and their compliance with their criteria because lack of correct criteria and not paying attention to the personality traits and characteristics of the spouse are the main causes of divorce [12]. A literature review showed that not paying attention to the criteria for choosing a spouse when getting married can be one of the sources of burnout and gradual deterioration of marital life [13].

In studying the prerequisites for a successful marriage, one of the things that should be considered is that individuals on the verge of first marriage experience different conditions and challenges than people seeking remarriage. For example, Peters [14] carried out a study on mate selection comparison and first and second marriages in a selected sample of remarried divorcees. The study led to the result that rationale is more evident in the second marriage. However, religious affiliations decline between the first and second marriage. In another study, Zal Olsen et al., pointed out that previous research on the same subject has not been capable of

distinguishing between different groups of remarried couples and those of marriage [15]. Furthermore, Beheshtian [12] specified that appearance, education, economic status, and man and woman's family satisfaction are not mostly different in the first and second marriages. But cultural, ethnic, religious, psychological and family status and common interests of both the man and the woman in the first and second marriages are different. Yousefi and Bagherian [13], in another study, indicated that a considerable difference exists between the content criterion of the marriage among individuals of the two groups, one seeking divorce and the other craving to continue living together. Those who wanted to keep their marital life paid more significant attention to the content criterion of marriage, i.e., personality, sociability, ethnicity, religion in comparison with those seeking divorce.

Regarding the fact that people on the verge of their first marriage and remarriage undergo different psychological, social and family conditions experiences, it is necessary that a comparative study be conducted on the attitudes and criteria of marriage concerning these two groups. Despite the importance of this issue, fewer researchers have examined these variables in these groups. The importance of this issue is felt even more than observing the difference in the attitudes and marriage criteria of the two groups. In this situation, premarital counselors can more easily prepare an appropriate training protocol for each of the groups seeking marriage. Therefore, given the existing research gap in Iran and other countries, the purpose of this study was to compare attitudes toward marriage and spouse selection criteria among people on the verge of first marriage and remarriage.

## Method

The present study is a causal-comparative. A causal-comparative design is a research design that seeks to find relationships between independent and dependent variables after an action or event has already occurred [16]. The statistical population of this study was all unmarried and divorced people seeking marriage referring to marriage registration offices and premarital counseling centers in Shiraz city. Researchers have stated that causal-comparative and experimental studies require more than 50 samples [17]. Therefore, in this study 120 people (60 people per group) using the convenient sampling method were selected as the sample, and finally, by discarding the distorted and incomplete questionnaires, a total of 112 people (56 people per group) were investigated as the final sample of the present study. The inclusion criteria included: the age range of 18-60 years, Iranian nationality, living in Shiraz, and willingness to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria also included: age older or younger than 18-60 years, not living in Shiraz, lack of desire to get married and lack of willingness to participate in the study.

After cooperating with marriage registration offices and premarital counselling centers in Shiraz, acquiring their contentment to take part in the development of this paper, and explaining the research objectives, the

researchers asked the sample to have their favorite questionnaire. Then, in case the marriage applicants referred to them, they first elaborated on the research objectives and second, obtained written participation consents. They were then provided with the questionnaires. Ultimately, after 112 questionnaires were completed in the offices and centers, the officials were appreciated and the questionnaires were inserted into SPSS22 in order to be statistically analyzed. Besides using descriptive indicators, an independent t-test was utilized so as to compare the scores of the two groups. Regarding the research ethical considerations, research objectives were clarified and participants were ensured that their information would remain confidential. Moreover, participants were allowed to leave the research anytime, hence the study was carried out based on respecting participant's preferences, anonymousness and confidentiality.

The tools used in this study are as follows:

**Martial Attitude Scale (MAS):** This questionnaire has been developed by Braaten and Rosén in 1998 and has 23 questions that measure people's attitudes toward marriage in terms of different dimensions such as; pessimistic attitude towards marriage (4, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 21, 22), optimistic attitude towards marriage (9, 11, 12, 19, 20, 23), realistic attitude towards marriage (1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 16), and the idealistic attitude to marriage (3, 8, 18). The MAS is scored by summing the individual item scores (Strongly Agree = 0; Agree = 1; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 3) after correcting for reverse keying nine items (1, 3, 5, 8, 12, 16, 19, 20, 23). The total MAS score can range from a minimum of 23 to a maximum of 92. Higher scores indicate a more positive attitude toward marriage. The internal reliability of the original version of this

questionnaire was obtained to be 0.82 using Coefficient alpha. Also, in assessing the validity, scores on the MAS moderately correlated with other measures of marital attitudes such as the Attitude toward Marriage Scale ( $r=0.77$ ) [18]. In an Iranian study [19], the content and convergent validity of this scale were confirmed and its reliability was obtained to be 0.76 using Cronbach's alpha method, which indicates that the reliability of this questionnaire is desirable. The Reliability of this scale in the present study was obtained to be 0.72 using Cronbach's alpha Coefficient.

**Preference Criteria of Spouse Selection Inventory (PCSSI):**

This questionnaire has been developed by Refahi et al. in 2010, which includes 22 criteria for choosing a spouse. The scoring of this questionnaire is done in the form of a Likert scale graded from very insignificant (1) to very important (5). The reliability of the original version of PCSSI was obtained to be 0.88 using Cronbach's alpha Coefficient. Moreover, the validity of this inventory has been checked and confirmed using the factor analysis method with principal components analysis and varimax rotation [20]. Also, the reliability of the inventory has been confirmed in a previous study [21] using the Cronbach's alpha method and retest for all dimensions of the questionnaire. The reliability of this questionnaire in the present study was obtained to be 0.80 using Cronbach's alpha Coefficient.

**Results**

The demographic characteristics of the members of the two groups are presented in the table below:

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics in the Group of First Marriage and Remarriage**

Variable	On the verge of first marriage		Remarriage applicant		Total		
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
Gender	Male	24	42.85%	25	44.64%	49	43.75%
	Female	32	57.14%	31	55.35%	63	56.25%
Education	Diploma and sub-diploma	15	26.78%	43	76.78%	58	51.78%
	Associate Degree	15	26.78%	5	8.92%	20	17.85%
	Bachelor degree	25	44.64%	6	10.71%	31	27.67%
	MA	1	1.78%	2	3.57%	3	2.67%
Age	Under 25 years	36	64.28%	11	19.64%	47	41.96%
	Over 25 years	20	35.71%	45	80.35%	65	58.03%

The findings of Table 1 show that in both groups, the frequency of women is higher than men. Also, this information shows that the group of singles is mostly under 25 years old, but the group of remarriage applicants is mostly over 25 years old.

Table 2 shows that among the criteria for choosing a spouse, the mean scores for components of age, job, physical attractiveness, income, the social fit of family, no previous marriage, moral and religious agreement, same ethnicity, nobility and not having sex before marriage in the single group on the verge of marriage is higher than the average score of the remarriage group, which is

statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). On the other hand, the average scores of physical health, mental health and decision-making criteria in the group seeking remarriage are higher than the group of single people on verge of marrying. However, this score difference is not statistically significant.

The table above shows that between the mean of components of the attitude toward marriage in single people on verge of marriage and the mean of components of the attitude toward marriage in individuals seeking remarriage with respect to the value of t and the level of significance in each of these

components, no statistically significant difference has been observed ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 2.** Results of an Independent T-test Comparing the Scores of Mating Selection Criteria in both Groups

Variable	Group	mean	SD	T	D.F	P
Age	On the verge of first marriage	4.21	0.56	2.88	110	0.005**
	Remarriage applicant	3.80	0.90			
Job	On the verge of first marriage	4.19	0.84	2.86	110	0.005**
	Remarriage applicant	3.66	1.11			
Appearance charm	On the verge of first marriage	4.26	0.58	3.11	110	0.002**
	Remarriage applicant	3.82	0.89			
Income	On the verge of first marriage	4.10	1.03	2.19	110	0.030**
	Remarriage applicant	3.62	1.27			
Family cultural fit	On the verge of first marriage	4.41	0.59	1.85	110	0.067
	Remarriage applicant	4.14	0.90			
Family social fit	On the verge of first marriage	4.37	0.64	3.63	110	0.0001**
	Remarriage applicant	3.80	0.98			
education	On the verge of first marriage	3.96	1.04	1.76	110	0.081
	Remarriage applicant	3.58	1.20			
physical health	On the verge of first marriage	4.46	0.57	-0.13	110	0.891
	Remarriage applicant	4.48	0.78			
mental health	On the verge of first marriage	4.46	0.53	-1.44	110	0.151
	Remarriage applicant	4.64	0.74			
Decision-making ability	On the verge of first marriage	4.48	0.53	-0.56	110	0.576
	Remarriage applicant	4.55	0.78			
Good social communication	On the verge of first marriage	4.55	0.60	0.40	110	0.686
	Remarriage applicant	4.50	0.78			
Ability to express feelings, opinions and desires	On the verge of first marriage	4.58	0.62	0.79	110	0.427
	Remarriage applicant	4.48	0.78			
Chastity	On the verge of first marriage	4.71	0.45	0.15	110	0.881
	Remarriage applicant	4.69	0.76			
No previous marriage	On the verge of first marriage	4.53	0.80	5.18	110	0.0001**
	Remarriage applicant	3.44	1.34			
Moral and religious agreement	On the verge of first marriage	5.39	6.78	1.28	110	0.200
	Remarriage applicant	4.21	0.90			
Same ethnicity	On the verge of first marriage	4.30	0.93	4.85	110	0.0001**
	Remarriage applicant	3.28	1.26			
nobility	On the verge of first marriage	4.67	0.50	2.64	110	0.009**
	Remarriage applicant	4.30	0.93			
Personality traits	On the verge of first marriage	4.66	0.47	1.31	110	0.190
	Remarriage applicant	4.48	0.89			
Responsibility	On the verge of first marriage	4.67	0.57	0.127	110	0.899
	Remarriage applicant	4.66	0.87			
Love and affection	On the verge of first marriage	4.76	0.46	0.156	110	0.877
	Remarriage applicant	4.75	0.71			
Not having sex before marriage	On the verge of first marriage	4.66	0.64	4.41	110	0.0001**
	Remarriage applicant	3.75	1.40			
Independence of vote or independence from family	On the verge of first marriage	4.35	0.68	1.64	110	0.130
	Remarriage applicant	4.28	0.90			

\* $P < 0.05$  \*\* $P < 0.01$

**Table 3.** Results of an Independent T-test Comparing the Score of Attitudes Toward Marriage in both Groups

Variable`	Group	mean	SD	T	D.F	P
A realistic view of marriage	On the verge of first marriage	17.25	3.51	-0.88	110	0.381
	Remarriage applicant	17.87	3.77			
An idealistic view of marriage	On the verge of first marriage	7.83	1.60	-0.90	110	0.368
	Remarriage applicant	8.16	2.12			
Pessimistic attitude towards marriage	On the verge of first marriage	28.32	6.39	1.59	110	0.113
	Remarriage applicant	26.46	5.91			
Optimistic attitude towards marriage	On the verge of first marriage	15.21	2.49	0.74	110	0.456
	Remarriage applicant	14.78	3.49			
Attitudes toward Marriage	On the verge of first marriage	68.62	8.75	0.82	110	0.413
	Remarriage applicant	67.26	8.73			

## Discussion

This study aimed to compare attitudes toward marriage and spouse selection criteria among people on the verge of first marriage and remarriage. The results of testing the hypothesis showed that there is no significant difference between the two groups in terms of any of the components of attitude towards marriage. This finding is indirectly in line with the results of Williams [22], which concluded that there is an agreement between different groups of young people and adults, rural and urban, and men and women on the importance of marriage. Also, Zal Olsen et al. [15] have pointed out in their research that previous research on remarriage and divorce has not been able to distinguish between different groups of remarried couples and between different groups of marriage.

To explain the absence of significant differences in attitudes toward marriage between people on the verge of first marriage and remarriage, we can use socio-cultural studies. In a study in this field, Hansson and Laidmäe [23] suggested that there is interplay between changes in the social context and attitudes toward divorce and post-divorce status. In other words, the absence of a significant difference in the attitude of bachelor and divorced people towards marriage and remarriage may be due to the fact that both groups live in a similar society and culture. Remarriage may be considered as a positive and constructive phenomenon as marriage according to the changes that have been made in the society's view towards remarriage of divorced individuals. Therefore, if there is a supportive and non-judgmental view in a society, both bachelor and divorced individuals will have a positive attitude towards marriage. In a study in this regard, Khan and Hamid [24] stated that divorce laws in East Asia have been more flexible. Therefore, just like marriage, divorce and post divorced lives are shaped by traditions, values, belief systems, social structures and cultural norms.

Moreover, in another explanation of this result, we can refer to the attachment theory. Based on this theory failure in intimate relationships, such that occurs in divorce, can lead to forming insecure attachment styles that in this conditions, people's attitudes toward romantic relationships, especially marriage, become negative. This issue is not just true for divorced individuals but also bachelor individuals who may have experienced failure in their intimate relationships with their family, colleagues or friends. In these conditions, the attitude of both groups toward marriage may be affected and this attitude can be negative. However, people with insecure attachment styles can heal their attachment wounds if they are located in secure relationships such as supportive and open relationships with others. In this stance, their attitude towards others and close relationships with them will be positive [25].

Other findings of the present study showed that there is a difference between the two groups in some criteria of marriage. This result is similar to the results of a study conducted by Beheshtian [12] who concluded that the criteria of appearance, education, economic status and family satisfaction of men and women in the first and

second marriages are not different. However, the cultural and ethnic, religious, psychological, family status, and common interests of men and women in first and second marriages are different. In addition to this, Peters [14] in a study showed that rationalism is higher in the second marriage and religious affiliation declines between the first and second marriage. In another similar study, Yousefi and Bagheryan [13] showed that there was a significant difference between the content criteria of marriage among individuals of the two groups seeking divorce and wanting to continue living together. People who wanted to continue living together paid more attention to the content criteria of marriage, such as personal, social, ethnicity and religious fitness compared to those seeking a divorce. This finding is somewhat consistent with the results of the present study. This is because in the present study, all significant differences in the criteria for choosing a spouse between the two groups were in favor of the single group on verge of marriage and the divorced group seeking remarriage showed lower mean scores in these criteria than the single group on verge of marriage.

There are various theories about marriage and related issues, one of which is mental development, according to which any person who has more growth and mental health has higher criteria for choosing a spouse [26]. Therefore, considering the above assumption and since the average scores of criteria such as job, income, physical attractiveness, etc. in the group of singles had a higher priority than the divorced group seeking remarriage, the result of this difference can be seen as the interpersonal experiences and previous marriages of the remarriage group, which may have led them to reconsider their criteria and be less influenced by the content criteria. Also, a review of demographic findings related to these two groups showed that there is a significant difference in the age range of members of the two groups so that the majority of members of the group of singles seeking marriage are under 25 years old but the majority of members of the group seeking remarriage are over 25 years old, which may be another reason for the difference in marriage criteria between the two groups. In most criteria, the scores of the single group are higher, except for some higher criteria such as physical health, mental health and decision-making ability that in those, scores of the group seeking remarriage is higher than the scores of the single group. However, the difference in scores in these criteria is not statistically significant, which may be due to the low sample size in the present study.

This research had some limitations including small sample size due to the prevalence of Covid-19, inability to homogenize groups in terms of education, gender and socio-economic status due to limited access to sample members, and researching in the city of Shiraz. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct another similar study with a larger sample size. In future studies, work on the lived experiences of divorced people on the verge of remarriage is recommended. It is also suggested that more research be conducted to examine the challenges of remarriage in Iran.

## Conclusion

The results of this research showed that despite the absence of differences in attitudes toward marriage between people on the verge of first marriage and remarriage which can be due to being in the same cultural or social context, differences exist in some spouse selection criteria among these groups. This issue can require them to receive different training in premarital counseling. Therefore, in premarital counseling, it is better to consider the needs, conditions and criteria of each group separately.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

## Ethical Approval

To observe the ethical principles in the research, in addition to explaining the objectives of the research to the participants, they were assured that their details would be kept confidential, and finally, a written informed consent was obtained from the participants in the present study.

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