Sleep Patterns & Marital Satisfaction

Lauren Randall & Brittany Skopek
Advised by: Susan Wolfgram, Ph.D.
University of Wisconsin-Stout

Research Problem
Because marriage is becoming “deinstitutionalized” with fewer people getting married and more people getting divorced in western industrial societies, we decided to look into different factors that could play a part in the satisfaction of a marriage (Cherlin, 2004, US Census Bureau 2012; Adams, 2004, as cited in Fincham & Beach, 2010).

Research Question & Hypothesis
What is the relationship between marital satisfaction and sleep patterns among a sample of Midwestern heterosexual married couples?

Hypothesis: Couples who have sleep patterns that are more similar to one another would experience a higher degree of marital satisfaction. Because we know that different environments react with one another, we also assume that the outside influences affecting sleep patterns would indirectly affect marital satisfaction.

Purpose
1. To examine the relationship between sleep patterns and marital satisfaction with a sample of Midwestern heterosexual married couples.
2. To develop a qualitative interview protocol to assess married couples’ perception of marital satisfaction.
3. Results from this study will add to the scant literature on marital satisfaction and sleep and provide practical application for professionals to help in strengthening marital relationships.

Theoretical Framework
- The Family Ecology Theory assumes that outside influences from multiple environments have a significant impact over a family’s emotions, interactions, behaviors, and life roles.
- As applied to our study, this theory would predict that every environment of the Family Ecology Theory impacts marital satisfaction, which could be indirectly linked to sleep patterns among married couples (Ingoldsby, Miller, & Smith, 2004).

Literature Review
Rauer et al. (2010) found there is a relationship between changes in marital conflict and sleep patterns.

Troxel et al. (2009) documented that sleep problems result when there are higher levels of marital unhappiness; sleep problems decline when marital satisfaction peaks.

Diamond et al. (2008) investigated temporary partner separation and found both partners experienced increased amounts of sleeping problems while away; sleeping problems reduced significantly upon reuniting with their partner.

Dittami et al. (2007) found there are monumental differences between males and females in reaction to pair sleep, as it was found to have negative implications for women (including sleep disruption throughout the night) but not the men.

Interview Protocol
1. Importance of sleep patterns prior to marriage
2. Contribution of sleep patterns to marital satisfaction
3. Pre-marital discussion about sleep patterns
4. Pre-marital wishful discussions about sleep patterns
5. Marital wake-up routine
6. Marital bedtime routine
7. Effects of stress on sleep patterns
8. Effects of sleep patterns on sex life
9. Source of sleep disruptions
10. Effects of sleep patterns on partner interaction
11. Sleep quality differences in presence or absence of partner
12. Additional information

“...when we have time in bed either waking or sleeping, the connection of talking with one another and physically cuddling contributes to our marital satisfaction greatly” - Alexa

Demographic Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Marriage</th>
<th>Time Spent in Bed with Spouse before Sleep</th>
<th>Time Spent in Bed with Spouse when Waking Up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than a year: 0</td>
<td>0:00:00</td>
<td>0:00:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years: 1</td>
<td>0:15:00</td>
<td>0:15:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years: 2</td>
<td>0:30:00</td>
<td>0:30:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years: 0</td>
<td>0:45:00</td>
<td>0:45:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16+ years: 16</td>
<td>1:00:00</td>
<td>1:00:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Method
- Participants: 10 married Midwestern couples
- Research Design: Snowball and Purposive
- Data Collection Instrument: IRB approved Qualtrics survey
- Procedure: A Qualitative Email Interview (Meho, 2006) conducted through Qualtrics in an email link. Informed consent, confidentiality, and right to withdraw were explained.
- Data analysis plan: A content analysis (Kvale, 1996) of the email interview responses was conducted by the two undergraduate researchers and themes were determined. An acronym was determined for each of the interview questions, followed by specific themes and relevant quotes.

Conclusion
Marital satisfaction has many effects over multiple environments of an individuals’ life (Keilock-Glaser, & Newton, 2001) and sleep has a direct effect on individual's biological functioning (Krueger & Friedman, 2009).

Findings of this study can be useful to professionals and researchers working with married couples and what contributes to marital satisfaction.

A key to positive marital satisfaction is to make communication between spouses a priority, and to continue communicating about preferenece of sleep patterns as each phase in life evolves.

Reserve time each day either before sleep at night or before activities in the morning to communicate relax, or being intimate with one another.

Selected Findings
- How do sleep patterns contribute to your marital satisfaction? Communication, Mood, Intimacy
- How do your sleep patterns affect the amount of interaction you have with your partner? Quality & quantity of interactions with spouse
- What is the difference in quality of sleep when you are sleeping with your partner versus when you are sleeping alone? Sleep quality increases with spouse; Failing asleep time increases with spouse; Security in sleeping with spouse
- Is there anything else that you would like us to know? Sleep is vital for health and relationships; Avoiding arguments and discussing stressful topics before bed produces a peaceful mind and good sleep quality

Implications
For Practitioners: Flexibility is key, compromise and conversation to create a sleep schedule (especially non-traditional shift work), encourage discussion with engaged couples, interaction before bed, healthy release for stress before bed.

Future Research: Larger number and wider diversity of participants; impact of non-traditional shift work, benefits or consequences of technology stimulation before bed, effective ways for couples to release their stress before bedtime.