

The Lived Experience of Couples with Attachment Trauma (Insecure Attachment) in Marital Relationships: A Phenomenological Research

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Extended Abstract

Aim

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the practical experiences of married couples who have undergone attachment trauma, specifically insecure attachment.

Methodology

The present investigation employed a qualitative approach, with its implementation utilizing the phenomenology method. The target population comprised every couple who was referred to Kermanshah counseling centers in 2019. The methodology employed in this study was a purposeful criteria-based approach. Interviews, sampling, and sample determination persisted until theoretical saturation was achieved, at which point the total number of participants reached 14 (consisting of 6 men and 8 women). A voluntary administration of the Carver Measure of Attachment Qualities (MAQ) was requested of couples referred to counseling centers in Kermanshah so that individuals with insecure attachment could be distinguished and identified. Following the identification of the volunteers' attachment styles, those who were deemed suitable for the research were requested to participate in the present study. In addition, the couples were required to meet certain entry criteria, which encompassed not only an insecure attachment but also a minimum age of 20 years, two years of marriage, and the absence of a specific physical or mental disorder. Also, the following were exclusion criteria for couples: severe marital issues and discord, mood and emotional disorders, opioid use, and physical illnesses. Information was gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The data underwent analysis utilizing Van Manen's method of theme analysis. An exhaustive examination of the interviews resulted in the development of five descriptions from the fourteen interviews in total. Following multiple rereadings of the interview texts, the principal design classes and themes were assigned to the corresponding classes. The principal common themes and subthemes were emphasized through the process of integrating them and eliminating superfluous ones. At this juncture, the articles were assessed and validated through the input of specialized professors and experts.

Findings

Upon conducting an analysis of the experiences of the participants, five overarching themes and thirty sub-themes were discerned: 1. Disturbed communication patterns (with five sub-themes of unavailability of the spouse, unresponsiveness of the spouse, having high expectations, intense control of the spouse, and jealousy); 2. The existence of mental disorders and difficulty in emotion regulation (with five sub-themes of anger, hate, anxiety, depression, somatization and psychosomatic diseases); 3. Domestic violence and aggression (with five sub-themes of leaving the spouse, punishing, forcing, threatening, aggressiveness or choosing impulsive strategies); 4. Intimidating sexual relations (comprising eight sub-themes including desiring greater autonomy, sexual reluctance, aloofness, aggressive sexual relations, engaging in sexual activity at an unsuitable time, abandoning sex during intercourse, unreasonable sexual expectations, and grieving the neglect of one's spouse); 5. Intimidating romantic and interpersonal connections (comprising seven sub-themes including heightened sensitivity, suspicion, and overvigilance, seeking reassurance, preferring solitude, and negative self-perception).

Conclusion

The results indicate that couples who have experienced attachment trauma have communication patterns that are disrupted, ultimately resulting in an emotional divorce from their married existence. Therefore, adult attachment-based training and enrichment courses are essential for preventing couple conflicts. Further investigation into the research background and the findings of this study may inspire other scholars to develop models that incorporate moderating and mediating variables in order to attain a more comprehensive and precise comprehension of the elements associated with insecure attachment in couples.

Keywords: Couples, Insecure Attachment, Lived Experiences, Marital Relationships.