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Factors Affecting Romantic Relationship in Lebanon

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Abstract. The concepts of romance and love are rapidly evolving with new modalities of romantic relationships in Lebanon (civil marriage, cohabitation) along with a catastrophic economic crisis affecting the country since 2019, and being ranked among the top ten crises worldwide. This document represents a cross-sectional study investigating 585 Lebanese participants from different Lebanese regions randomly sampled using the snowball method. Besides, the Relationship dynamics scale (RDS) was used to evaluate vulnerability for conflicts in the context of romantic relationship and their correlates, with a very good internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha of 0.908) and an excellent validity (Factor analysis using Promax technique). The results are as follows: A higher vulnerability for conflicts in the context of amorous relations is associated with having a child or a partner with handicap or receiving an actual chronic treatment (personal, for children or for the partner), having 3 or more children and finally having high financial stressors. Moreover, this survey evaluated factors modulating financial burden and stress using the InCharge Financial Distress / Financial Well-Being (IFDFW) scale. The results showed that working only with day shifts schedule, being male, having physical activity of a minimum of 2.5 hours per week, having a partner working outside Lebanon, having an income in currency other than Lebanese Pound, and being married at an age above 30 years are associated with less stressful economic status. While on the other hand, having a history of chronic treatment (Personal, Partner or children) and being married before 18 years were correlated with high levels of economic stress.

Keywords. Romance, Conflicts, Financial Burden, RDS score, IFDFW Score

[1] Introduction

Romantic relationships significantly influence individuals' emotional well-being and social integration, acting as a primary source of self-esteem and personal fulfillment (1). The process of establishing and maintaining these connections has profound implications, not only during youth but also in later life stages (2). Research consistently highlights that love enhances overall happiness, life satisfaction, and mental health, contributing positively to physical well-being (4). Furthermore, shared experiences and mutual support within romantic partnerships can lead to greater emotional stability and resilience among individuals (3).

However, romantic relationships are not without their challenges. Conflicts arising from jealousy, anger, and communication breakdowns can undermine relationship satisfaction and may lead to psychological distress (4, 5). Studies suggest that the manner in which couples manage conflicts plays a critical role in determining relationship outcomes, with collaborative

conflict resolution strategies linked to higher levels of satisfaction (5, 6). Additionally, external factors, such as financial stress and health issues, can complicate relationship dynamics, further influencing emotional well-being (7, 8).

The cultural context significantly shapes romantic interactions, particularly in the Middle East, where traditional norms often restrict dating and pre-marital relationships (9). Despite these challenges, modern attitudes among younger generations are shifting towards embracing love and romance as foundational elements for marriage (10). In Lebanon, a nation characterized by a complex demographic landscape and evolving concepts of love, the ongoing socio-economic crisis has further impacted romantic relationships, influencing financial stability and emotional health (11, 12).

This study aims to explore these dynamics by validating the Relationship Dynamics Scale (RDS) within the Lebanese context and examining the factors that modulate conflicts among romantic couples amidst the current economic challenges.

[2] Literature Review

Romantic relationships play a significant role in enhancing emotional well-being and social integration, contributing to individuals' self-esteem [1]. Establishing and maintaining these connections can have beneficial effects that extend into later life stages, highlighting the importance of love for overall well-being and mental health [2]. Research consistently shows that love is positively correlated with human happiness, life satisfaction, and security, which further emphasizes its role in promoting good mental health [3].

Despite the positive aspects of romantic relationships, they can also lead to negative outcomes. Conflict in romantic partnerships, characterized by issues such as jealousy and anger, frequently disrupts relationship satisfaction and may contribute to psychological disturbances [4]. Studies indicate that the style of conflict management is critical in determining relationship outcomes, with collaborative approaches yielding higher satisfaction levels compared to competitive styles [5].

The dynamics of romantic relationships are further complicated by external factors such as health problems in partners, financial stress, and relationship duration prior to marriage [6, 7]. Financial distress has been linked to various personal factors, including gender, physical activity levels, and work conditions, which can all influence relationship satisfaction [8, 9, 10, 11].

In the Middle Eastern context, societal norms significantly impact romantic relationships. Dating and love before marriage are often considered taboo due to cultural and religious restrictions [12]. However, contemporary attitudes among young adults in Muslim-majority countries suggest a shift toward embracing romance as a foundation for marriage [12]. Lebanon, in particular, exhibits a complex demographic landscape where concepts of love and romantic relationships are evolving, reflecting changes in societal norms around cohabitation and civil marriage [13].

The socio-economic landscape in Lebanon has been particularly tumultuous since the revolution beginning in October 2019, leading to a financial crisis characterized by currency devaluation and rising living costs [14, 15]. These conditions have a profound impact on couples, affecting their financial stability and emotional well-being, which in turn influences the dynamics of their relationships [16, 17].

The current study aims to validate the Relationship Dynamics Scale (RDS) within this unique socio-cultural context of Lebanon, exploring factors that modulate conflicts among

romantic couples and the elements contributing to financial distress during the ongoing economic crisis.

[3] Research Method

1. Settings and Participants

A cross sectional study was conducted among Lebanese citizens from all districts (Bekaa, Beyrouth, Mount Lebanon, South and North Lebanon), using the snowball method for recruitment between March and May 2022. This process was accomplished using an online survey distributed through social media applications (Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram). Participants were asked to share the survey link with their acquaintances.

The study recruited 592 Lebanese citizens aged minimum of 18 years old. In fact, 18 is considered the age of maturity in Lebanon [18].

Those included in the study were those engaged in a romantic relationship. Single participants were excluded as well as six of the responders who didn't agree to enter the study.

2. Minimal Sample Size calculation

The statistical software for epidemiology developed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Epi Info) was used to calculate the minimal sample size required based on a confidence level of 95%. The calculated necessary sample size is of 334 for an expected frequency of 68% for being married or in a devoted relationship based on a study done in United States of America [19].

In fact, lately in Lebanon, the form and concept of "family and romance" are changing. So, we can realize new types of relationships between individuals going from cohabitation, to different aspects of marriage: civil, secret or temporary marriages [16].

3. Ethical approval

The objective of the study was explained to all participants in the first part of the google form. All data is kept anonymous and confidential. No financial benefits were distributed to participants, so each person who receives the link was totally free to reject or to accept the participation in the study. Besides, answering with yes, the first question about willing to participate in the study was considered the equivalent for a written consent.

4. Questionnaire

This study was designed in Arabic, the native Lebanese language. Fifteen minutes were necessary to fill out and submit the form. It was constituted by several parts:

4.1. Sociodemographic characteristics

This part included questions about individuals' sex, age, smoking and physical activity history, educational level, romantic relationship characteristics (type, duration, age at first encounter), parity and fertility history, employment status and characteristics.

4.2. In charge Financial Distress / Financial Well Being score (IFDFW)

It is a self-reporting scale designed in eight subjective items (ranging from 1 to 10), having an adequate validity and reliability to evaluate the perceived financial burden of the responder. The less the score, the worse is the effect of financial distress on the responder [20].

4.3. The Relationship dynamics scale (RDS)

It is a questionnaire designed with questions about eight domains of the relationship between couple's members. It was used to quantify the frequency of conflicts in romantic

relationships. The higher the score, the higher the conflict frequency is between partners with good validity and reliability measures [20].

4.4. Translation Procedure

The online survey consisted of closed-ended questions in Arabic. It was pilot tested on ten subjects to check the clarity of the questionnaire. The link to Google Form was then distributed to potential respondents.

5. Statistical Analysis

Answers' forms were gathered in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Data were analyzed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program version 25. A descriptive analysis was established with percentages and counts for categorical variables with Standard deviations and means for continuous measures.

The bivariate analysis was calculated using the parametric tests (Mann-Whitney Test, the One Way Anova Test) and the non-parametric test (Kruskall Wallis Test) when conditions were not fulfilled. And the results were listed based on a confidence interval of 95% and a margin of error of 5%.

[4] Results

Relationship Dynamic Scale (RDS) is eight items measure with good reliability and excellent validity [18]. In the current study we used the Arabic version of RDS [26].

1. Sample Description

The sample consisted of 585 participants with 67.3% being male. 40.8% of the participants are between 31 and 45 years old. Applicants are from different Lebanese regions with 61.5% coming from Mount Lebanon. Regarding nicotine exposure, 62.2% of the responders are neither actively nor passively exposed. Besides, only 26.3% of the reporters maintain physical activity with a minimum total duration of two and a half hours per week. Regarding income, only 21.5% earn different currencies than Lebanese pound. And in the subject of work characteristics, 72.6% of the responders works day shifts with a minority of 11.9% of the responders having their partner working abroad. Concerning nature of applicants' work, information can be found in the Table 1.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Sample Characteristics		Number (%)	
Sex	Male	190	(32.6 %)
	Female	395	(67.3%)
Age	18–30	207	(35.25%)
	31–45	239	(40.8 %)
	45–60	107	(18.35%)
	>60	32	(5.6 %)
Married	Yes	460	(78.05 %)
	No	125	(21.45 %)
Nicotine Exposure (smoking, ...)	Yes	116	(19.8%)
	No	364	(62.2%)
	No Answer	105	(18%)



Physical Activity	Yes	154	(26.3%)
	No	326	(55.7%)
	No Answer	105	(18%)
Duration of actual marriage	< 5 Years	111	(18.97%)
	From 5 to 10 years	88	(15.04 %)
	From 10 to 15 Years	59	(10.09 %)
	More than 15 Years	167	(28.55 %)
	Not married	160	(27.35 %)
Before Marriage Relation Duration	Less than one year	51	(8.85 %)
	From 1 to 2 years	137	(23.45 %)
	From 2 to 5 Years	256	(43.55 %)
	Not Married	141	(24.15 %)
Number of children	0	187	(31.93 %)
	1 or 2	230	(39.23 %)
	3 or more	168	(28.84%)
Personal Fertility Problem	Yes	26	(4.73 %)
	No	438	(74.43 %)
	I Don't Know	121	(20.83 %)
Partner Fertility Problem	Yes	15	(2.83 %)
	No	436	(74.13 %)
	I Don't Know	134	(23.03 %)
Age of marriage	< 18 years	7	(1.2 %)
	Between 19 and 24 Years old	118	(20.17 %)
	Between 25 and 30 Years old	213	(36.4%)
	More than 30 Years Old	94	(16.07 %)
	Not Married	153	(26.16%)
Partner or Children's handicap	Yes	29	(5.4 %)
	No	556	(94.6 %)
Chronic Treatment (Personal, Partner or children)	Yes	99	(16.9 %)
	No	381	(65.1%)
	No answer	105	(18%)
My Partner Works Abroad	Yes	70	(11.9 %)
	No	410	(70.1 %)
	No answer	105	(18%)
Income In Currency Other Than Lebanese Pound.	Yes	126	(21.5 %)
	No	354	(60.5 %)
	No answer	105	(18%)
Education Level	Elementary Education Level	5	(0.85 %)
	Complementary Education Level	39	(6.6 %)
	Secondary Education Level	75	(12.8 %)
	University Education Level	464	(79.3 %)

	I Have Not Received Any Education	2	(0.45 %)
Job Nature	No Work	142	(24.3 %)
	Free Lancer	120	(20.5 %)
	Employee	323	(55.2 %)
Work Shift	Day Shift	425	(72.6%)
	Night Shift	32	(5.5 %)
	Not Working	128	(21.9%)
Region	Mount Lebanon	360	(61.5%)
	North	156	(26.6%)
	South	13	(2.2 %)
	Bekaa	17	(2.9 %)
	Beyrout	21	(3.6 %)
	Akar	18	(3.2 %)

Note. 9. Categorical variables are expressed as percentages.

2. Reliability and validity of the Relationship Dynamics scale

The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the RDS questionnaire in the studied sample is 0.908 indicating a very good internal consistency for use in the present survey (see Table 1). A factor analysis was done to evaluate the reliability of the RDS scale using Promax technique and to ensure a good adequacy. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure for sampling adequacy is of 0.917 and Bartlett test of sphericity was significant (probability value (p)<0.001) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation between the IFDFW score and other variables.

Independent variables	Groups	Mean ± standard deviation (SD)	Probability value (P value)
Sex	Male	31.51 ± 18.97	0.016
	Female	27.54 ± 18.32	
Physical Activity	Yes	32.38 ± 18.13	0.001
	No	26.44 ± 18.3	
Having a partner working abroad	Yes	33.10 ± 20.07	0.02
	No	27.54 ± 18.04	
Income in currency other than Lebanese Pound	Yes	41.79 ± 19.04	0.0001
	No	23.56 ± 15.65	
Working shift	Day shift	29.81 ± 18.89	0.2
	Night shift	20.63 ± 13.71	
	Not working	27.62 ± 18.61	
Chronic treatment (personal, Partner or Children)	Yes	24.58 ± 18.630	0.022
	No	29.33 ± 18.286	
Age of marriage	< 18 years	14.86 ± 6.23	0.01
	Between 19 and 24 years	24.76 ± 17.37	
	Between 25 and 30 years	30.21 ± 19.07	
	> 30 years	31.84 ± 20.36	

	Not married	28.83 ± 17.5	
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Note. Quantitative variables are expressed as mean ± standard deviation (SD)

None of the items was rejected from the questionnaire with all the items of the RDS score being classified into one factor (see Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation between the Relationship Dynamics scale and other variables.

Independent variables	Groups	Relationship dynamic scale	Probability value (P value)
Chronic Treatment (Personal, Partner or Children),	Yes	15.67 ± 6.59	0.044
	No	14.21 ± 6.20	
Child or partner with handicap	Yes	17.71 ± 9.096	0.005
	No	14.27 ± 6.18	
Duration of the romantic relationship before marriage	< 5 years	13.20 ± 6.07	0.179
	5-10 years	15.15 ± 7.13	
	10-15 years	14.52 ± 5.43	
	> 15 years	14.32 ± 6.40	
	not married	14.32 ± 6.40	
Having 3 or more children	0	13.28 ± 5.96	0.012
	1 or 2	15.10 ± 6.95	
	3 or more	14.83 ± 5.89	
IFDFW Score	Pearson correlation p= -0.109		0.01

Note. Quantitative variables are expressed as mean ± SD

3. Bivariate Analysis

Being male (0.016), having physical activity of a minimum of 2.5 hours per week (0.001), having a partner working abroad (0.02), having an income in currency other than Lebanese Pound (0), working only day shifts (0.019) and being married at an age above 30 years (0.01) are associated with a higher level of IFDFW score.

In contrast, having a present history of chronic treatment (personal, partner or children) (0.022) and being married at an age below 18 years old (0.01) are associated with a lower score of IFDFW (0.024) (see Table 2).

Concerning the Relationship Dynamics scale (RD-scale), having a child or a partner with handicap (0.005) or having a history of present chronic treatment (personal, for children or for the partner) (0.044) is associated with a higher score. Besides, having 3 or more children

(0.012) is associated with a lower score (see Table 3). And at last, IFDFW was negatively associated with RDS (0.01) (see Table 3).

However, no association has been found between the IFDFW score and the working shift (Table 2), and no association has been found between the Relationship Dynamics scale and the duration of the romantic relationship before marriage (see Table 3).

[5] Discussion

Concerning IFDFW score, our study results showed that working only day shifts, being male, having physical activity of a minimum of 2.5 hours per week, having a partner working abroad, having an income in currency other than Lebanese Pound, and being married at an age above 30 years are associated with a higher level of IFDFW score and subsequently with less stressful economic status.

In contrast, having a present history of chronic treatment (personal, partner or children) and being married at an age below 18 are associated with a lower score of IFDFW and in conclusion a more stressful economic status.

Regarding Relationship Dynamics scale, our study showed that having a child or a partner with handicap or having a history of present chronic treatment (personal, for children or for the partner), dating for less than one year before marriage and having 3 or more children are associated with higher scores and more vulnerability for conflicts subsequently. And finally, IFDFW was negatively associated with RDS.

1. Economic Stress and its correlates

Our results, consistent with a previous study, indicate that being male is associated with lower financial stress [21]. In fact, while having same stress levels, women report increasing stress measures comparing to men [11].

Besides, in compliance with a preceding survey, the present results confirmed that physical activity moderates the effect of financial stress [12]. As a matter of fact, sedentary lifestyle is not only a personal source of financial stress, but also an important base for societal monetary loosing [11].

In the present study, working only during the day is associated with less financial stress comparing to working at night. In fact, higher level of working fatigue was associated with high mental health problems [11, 17]. In line with another study showing that long shifts at night increases the work load and subsequently affects negatively the mental wellbeing [22].

Furthermore, the actual study showed that those married at an age above 30 have lower levels of financial distress, while those married at an age below 18 have higher levels of financial distress. In fact, these findings confirm the reality that the marriage of younger adults predispose for being economically disadvantaged due to lower financial and educational levels of their parents [13].

In addition, the present calculation showed that having a partner working abroad and having an income in currency other than Lebanese Pound are associated with high levels of IFDFW score and subsequently low financial stress. In fact, Lebanon is facing one of the top 10 economic crisis with a shortage of dollars [23].

And at last concerning IFDFW score and financial pressures, the review showed that having a chronic treatment to afford for a family member is also associated with higher financial stress. In fact, an earlier study done with a sample of 253 Lebanese chronic patients showed

that 29% of them stopped their chronic treatment before Beirut blast with half of them due to financial issues [24].

2. Romantic Relationship conflict and its correlates

In the subject of romantic relationship conflicts, the actual study indicated that having a history of handicap chronic treatment in the family unit, having 3 or more children and dating for less than one year before marriage are associated with higher vulnerability for conflicts.

Actually, in a context of chronic diseases, studies showed that an unwell partner may figure a changing feeling, while the healthy other half may be unable to manage the subsequent changes. Making the bond vulnerable for conflicts and break down [7].

And, although a good romantic relationship for a person with disabilities gives him benefits, the need for help with numerous physical and social constraints may affect negatively the course of the relationship [15].

Concerning the association between the number of children and couple satisfaction, previous studies showed contradictory results. In fact, some studies exhibited that being a parent generates more wellbeing for partners [6,10]. While others, concluded that the children's number is negatively correlated with couple's satisfaction [13]. And according to a previous survey, these differences are due to multiple factors in relation with sex societal role and pressure [11].

But concerning the direct link between the number of children and romantic conflicts, we have a lack of information especially concerning the Lebanese population. The actual result may be the consequence of the financial burden increasing with the ascending number of children.

Furthermore, in our study, dating for less than one year before marriage was found to be associated with more conflicts. This result came in line with a previous study showing that an appreciable part of the participants reported a need to further knowledge of their partner before marriage to understand how to manage differences causing conflicts or to break up the relation. Hence, longer duration of dating before marriage is needed [9].

Finally, the current study found an association between high IFDFW scores and high RDS scores, indicating a positive correlation between financial distress and vulnerability for conflicts. In fact, financial problems were listed as a major cause of conflicts and divorce in consequence in previous studies [9].

3. Limitations

This study surveyed 585 Lebanese citizens sampled with snowball method. The sample size is advantageous, and the questionnaire was provided in Arabic native language with validated questionnaires.

However, the study bears a limitation that could limit the validity of results. In fact, 61.5% of the responders were from the region of Mount Lebanon, making Lebanese from other regions less investigated with the actual study.

[6] Conclusion

It is a cross sectional study conducted in Lebanon, in the context of evolving concepts of romance and love, and a catastrophic actual economic crisis. This study will surely help to understand the factors affecting romantic relation stressors and conflicts.

The study investigated Lebanese participants with RDS and IFDFW scores and showed that: Having three or more children, having a child or partner's history of handicap or chronic treatment and having economic issues are associated with a tendency towards conflicts between partners.

Moreover, working only with day shifts schedule, being male, having physical activity of a minimum of 2.5 hours per week, having a partner working outside Lebanon, having an income in currency other than Lebanese pounds, and being married at an age above 30 years are associated with less economic stress. On the other side, having a history of chronic treatment (Personal, Partner or children) and being married before 18 years were correlated with high levels of economic burden.

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