

Review of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory – Revised

by Laura Welfare, Ph.D.

I. General Information

A. Title: Marital Satisfaction Inventory, Revised (MSI-R)

B. Author: Douglas K. Snyder

C. Publisher: Western Psychological Services, 12031 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles California, 90025-1251

D. Forms; groups to which applicable: One form, for use with married couples. Available in English and Spanish versions.

E. General type: Self-reported nature and extent of relationship distress.

F. Date of publication: 1997

G. Practical features: The MSI-R can be individually or group administered. Written forms or computer forms are available.

H. Cost: \$104.00 per introductory test kit. The kit includes the manual and 20 AutoScore forms. Additional forms are available in packages of 20 for \$48.00.

I. Time required to administer: This assessment can be administered and scored in approximately 25 minutes.

II. Purpose and Nature of the Instrument

A. Stated purpose: The MSI-R is a revised measure of marital conflict and discord (Snyder, 1997). It is a self-report measure that identifies positive and potentially problematic dimensions within the relationship. Each partner in the relationship takes the assessment. The interpretation of results is designed to inform the counseling process. It can be used as a tool to identify areas of relationship distress and relative strength.

B. Description of test, items and scores: The assessment is comprised of 150 true/false items. The items are grouped into subscales: Inconsistency, Conventionalization, Global Distress, Affective Communication, Problem-Solving Communication, Aggression, Time Together, Disagreement About Finances, Role Orientation, Family History of Distress, Dissatisfaction with Children, and Conflict over Child Rearing. The items are written on a sixth grade reading level.

C. Use in counseling: The MSI-R is primarily used to assess marital discord in couples seeking relationship counseling. It also may be used in family counseling or in counseling with a child or adolescent as the parental relationship impacts all family members.

III. Practical Evaluation:

A. Usefulness of the manual: The user manual is thorough and informative. The author reports details of the development and validation of the instrument as well as relevant psychometrics. The

author also includes case studies with detailed score reports and interpretations. The administration booklet has written directions that can be read aloud by the administrator.

IV. Technical Considerations

A. Normative Sample: Data from a sample of 1020 couples was collected during 1995 and 1996. Respondents ranged in age from 16 to 92 years. Seventy-five percent of the sample was between the ages of 20 and 49 years. Collection sites were geographically diverse. Eighty-seven percent of the men and 69% of the women reported that they are employed outside of the home. The job categories identified by respondents were as follows: 26.8% business manager or lower professional, 20.8% clerical, sales, or technical, 13.4% skilled manual, 12.1% executive or advanced professional, 10.8% administrator or small business owner, 9% unskilled, and 7.1% semi-skilled or machine operator. The most common response of number of children was 2. Approximately 76.3% of the respondents identified themselves as white, while 12.9% were black, 8.6% were Hispanic, 1.4 % were Asian, and .8% other.

B. Reliability: The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for overall internal consistency was a .82. The individual subscale internal consistency coefficients are as follows: Conventionalization .83, Global Distress .93, Affective Communication .85, Problem-Solving Communication .89, Aggression .81, Time Together .80, Disagreement About Finances .79, Role Orientation .83, Family History of Distress .78, Dissatisfaction with Children .70, and Conflict over Child Rearing .78. This suggests high internal consistency for all of the subscales. The six week test-retest reliability was collected from 105 couples from the general population over a 6-week interval. The mean test-retest reliability coefficient was .79. This is an acceptable level of test-retest reliability. However, no information was given about the events or experiences that could have affected change on the couple's marital satisfaction during the elapsed 6-week period. There is the possibility that taking the assessment or participating in the study affected the scores.

C. Validity: The validity of the MSI-R was established by correlating it with the well established previous version of the MSI (Snyder, 1979). The median correlation score was a .95, which indicates a strong correlation. The MSI has been studied using clinically diverse samples. Evidence of validity has been demonstrated in that the MSI differentiates between groups that would be expected to differ on levels of marital satisfaction. Westerman and Schonholz found that marital conflict is elevated in parents of behaviorally disturbed children and adolescents. There is some evidence of significant subscale differences between couples in counseling and couples not in counseling (Snyder, Wills, & Keiser, 1981). Another source of evidence for validity is in test-retest measures of couples in therapy. The MSI was given to 59 couples prior to and after completing counseling (Snyder & Willis, 1989). The post test indicates significant improvement in Global Distress, Affective Communication, Problem-Solving Communication, and Time Together.

V. Evaluation

A. Comments of reviewers and general evaluation: The MSI-R is a well established measure of marital satisfaction and discord. The test instructions are clear and the instrument is easy to complete. Because it is a self-report measure the accuracy of the results relies on honest disclosure from the respondent. There are two subscales included that are designed to identify respondents who answer inconsistently or with distortions. The results are valuable for assessment and treatment planning in couples counseling. Scores can be interpreted in a number of ways. Subscale scores can be compared to identify areas of relative strength and weakness. Scores can be compared within the couple to identify areas of marital discord that are important to each partner. Scores also can be converted to normed scores to evaluate the overall severity of the discord in comparison with other couples. The clinical implications of these scoring options are vast. Additionally, because the assessment does not prescribe a specific treatment modality, counselors will vary theoretical

orientations can utilize the instrument. The MSI-R can provide useful stimuli for discussion and goal setting in couples or family work.

A major weakness of the instrument is the lack of factor analysis data. The items were chosen by the author based on predetermined content areas. No factor analysis data is available for the items; therefore it is unclear whether the subscale structure is equivalent to the factor structure. The evidence of reliability and validity reported by the author suggests some psychometric stability of the instrument, but a factor analysis would further strengthen the MSI-R and may reduce the number of items needed to capture the relevant information.

Fowers states that the MSI-R is the strongest measure of marital satisfaction available (1990). Others have touted the instrument multidimensional nature and broad application Boen, 1988). Despite psychometric limitations, the MSI-R can be a valuable tool for professionals working with couples in marital counseling.

REFERENCES

- Boen, D. L. (1988). A practitioner looks at assessment in marital counseling. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 66*, 484-486.
- Fowers, B. J. (1990). An interactional approach to standardized marital assessment: A literature review. *Family Relations, 39*, 368-377.
- Snyder, D. K. (1979). *Marital satisfaction inventory*. Los Angeles, CA: Western Psychological Services.
- Snyder, D. K. (1997). *Marital satisfaction inventory, revised*. Los Angeles, CA: Western Psychological Services.
- Snyder, D. K., Wills, R. M. (1989). Behavioral versus insight-oriented marital therapy: Effects on individual and interspousal functioning. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 57*, 39-46.
- Snyder, D. K., Wills, R. M., & Keiser, T. W. (1981). Empirical validation of the marital satisfaction inventory: An actuarial approach. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 49*, 262-268.
- Westerman, M. a. & Schonholtz, J. (1993). Marital adjustment, joint parental support in a triadic problem-solving task and child behavior problems. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 22*, 97-106.