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**DIFFERENCE IN  
RELATIONSHIP  
SATISFACTION  
AND ADULT  
ATTACHMENT IN  
MARRIED AND  
COHABITATING  
COUPLES**

*51-69*

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**::POVZETEK****STAN ODRASLIH KOT ODRAZ MEDSEBOJNEGA ZADOVOLJSTVA TER ODRASLE NAVEZANOSTI**

ZADOVOLJSTVO V ZAKONU JE definirano z več dejavniki; od finančne varnosti, konstruktivnih načinov soočanja s problemi, ustrezne komunikacije partnerjev, medsebojne opore ter njune odrasle navezanosti.

V raziskavi nas je zanimalo, kako se odnos poročenih in živečih zunaj zakonske skupnosti razlikuje v zadovoljstvu z odnosom ter v odrasli navezanosti partnerjev. Sodelovalo je 265 parov, od tega jih je bilo 210 poročenih in 48 neporočenih. Udeleženci so reševali vprašalnik Doživljanje odnosov z bližnjimi ECR-R (Chris R. Fraley & Waller, 1998; Chris R. Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) ter Kansaško lestvico zadovoljstva v zakonu, KMS (Schumm et al., 1986).

Kot smo predvidevali, so rezultati potrdili večje zadovoljstvo poročenih partnerjev v primerjavi z neporočenimi. Bolj varno navezani partnerji so se pokazali kot bolj zadovoljni z zakonom od manj varno navezanih. Pri povezanosti varne navezanosti ter zakonskega stanu so se glede na spol pokazale pomembne razlike. Poročene ženske so bile bolj varno navezane od neporočenih, medtem ko se razlika v navezanosti med poročenimi in neporočenimi moškimi ni pokazala kot pomembna.

**Ključne besede:** poroka, zunajzakonska skupnost, zadovoljstvo z odnosom, odrasla navezanost.

**ABSTRACT**

*Relationship satisfaction is determined by various factors such as economic and social security of partners, their constructive problem solving, mutual compacts reaching, parental supportive behavior and their adult attachment.*

*Our study has been designed to examine the differences in relationship satisfaction and adult attachment of married and cohabiting couples. Two hundred and sixty-five heterosexual couples participated in the study. Couples were asked to complete the questionnaire Experience in Close Relationship-Revised (ECRU-R) (Chris R. Fraley & Waller, 1998; Chris R. Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS) (Schumm, et al., 1986).*

*As predicted results showed higher relationship satisfaction for married than cohabiting couples. There was a general trend for more securely attached partners to be more satisfied in the relationship than less securely attached. Surprisingly,*

*the connection between adult attachment and relationship satisfaction differed in relation to participants' gender; wives were more securely attached than cohabiting women, while the difference in attachment between husbands and cohabiting men was not significant.*

*Keywords: marriage, cohabitation, relationship satisfaction, adult attachment.*

## **::1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **::1.1 Marriage vs. cohabitation**

Focus of many authors from psychological, sociological and anthropological field is nowadays oriented in discovering marriage as very important normative turning point for young adults who decide to live in their own family (Brown, 2004). On the one hand, marriage can be a synonym for a strong emotion, passion and manifestation of attractiveness between partners. Authors agree, marital status is an important predictor of personal psychological well-being and as social structure plays key role in determining family relationships and process (Acock & Demo, 1994). At the same time marriage requires emotional maturity of both partners, their capability to discover new ways of identifying themselves in a relationship. Partners learn to form emotional contact, freedom from defensiveness, freedom from fear, flexibility, empathy and a basic sense of independence with an ability to accept dependency (K. L. Kompan Erzar, 2003; Lyman, 1975).

Studies from psychological and other field have indicated a decrease in marriages in comparison to cohabitation, which has become an increasingly common type of couple union (Cannon, 1999). Due to the rise in divorce rate, (Castro-Martin & Bumpass, 1989; de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2006; Gottman, 1994), researchers are examining the factors that dissuade partners from the decision to marry, but at the same time they are searching for factors that encourage couples to marry and to be satisfied at the same time (Esser, 2002).

Various empirical studies and also every day experience prove that decision to marry is beyond a decision for a joint housekeeping. Satisfied marriage is considered to be more solid and long lasting than satisfied cohabitation in different communities (Bouchard, 2006; Vaculik & Jedrzejczykova, 2009). National researches from early nineties also provide a good evidence of a marriage to be a more solid and tighter union than cohabitation as husbands and wives were more satisfied with the relationship despite the fact that they spent less time together than cohabitant pairs (Brown & Booth, 1996). However,

married couples tend to put less emphasis on physical closeness and thus seem to be more emotionally connected and settled in the relationship than cohabitant partners (Cannon, 1999). Based on these findings higher relationship satisfaction rate of married in comparison to cohabitant partners of different ages corresponds with the higher openness and frankness of married couples (Evans & Kelley, 2004). The authors found out different parameters influence partners' decision on marriage or joined housekeeping. Cohabitation, seen as an example of emotionally more distant relationship, is often a result of short-term and achieved characteristics (such as education, equal interests, hobbies) and less the result of long-term and ascribed characteristics (such as age, religion, and race) (Schoen & Weinick, 1993). Partners' religion is considered to be one of most important factors when deciding upon getting married or not (Thornton, Axinn, & Hill, 1992).

A custom of marrying is a formal ritual where partners break the bonds with their primary families and accept each other as a part of a new family. Results of different studies confirmed the fact that cohabitant partners who are planning to get married do not differ from married persons with respect to relationship quality, level of intimacy and emotional connection. This is seen as the evidence for "cohabitation effect", which suggests that short-term relationships, higher physical attachment, lower intimacy and lack of trust between partners is not connected with those partners who have decided to marry in the future (Cannon, 1999). The importance of marriage has been the focus of many studies. Some of them confirmed painful experiences with the family of origin and peers, which may influence the occurrence of cohabitation rather than marriage as a first union (Brennom, 2001). Cohabitation, comparing to marriage, has been chosen by partners who have greater adolescent association with deviant peers, by partners whose parents have lower religious beliefs and values, or by those who were raised with less parental warmth and observed nurture involvement.

The studies are very persuasive in mentioning the gender differences in ideas about and attitude towards marriage. Marriage discords tend to be more painful for women in comparison to men, as men more often see marriage as the scene of approval and acceptance. Differences between genders were defined when complaining about the relationship as well (married women were particularly likely to complain about their husbands not paying them sufficient attention, while husbands were not pleased as they believed their views were too independent) (Cunningham, Braiker, & Kelley, 1982). This is because women invested more energy in marital relationships and experienced marriage more deeply than men. However, this can consequently lead to gender differed burnout rates caused by stress inside the relationship. The

reason that men and women, even in the same marriage, experienced different burnout rates-, and that their perspective of marital life reality might be very disharmonic, is that we can sometimes judge the women's personal happiness through the marital satisfaction (Pines, 1987).

## **::1.2 Adult attachment**

The majority of recent authors agree that adult attachment is one of the crucial concepts, describing the union satisfaction, relationship trust, degree of intimacy and mental well being of partners (K. Kompan Erzar, 2006; Sibley & Overall, 2008). The attachment theory provides the basis for most of the explanations of child or adult forming relations in the outside world. Psychoanalyst John Bowlby wrote about the importance of early interaction between child and caregiver which results in working models of attachment. The results of early interaction are the affective-cognitive constructs (Bowlby, 1975), which include expectations about self, other and the relationship between self and other. Hazan and Shaver pointed out the similarity between the adult romantic relations and infant-caregiver relations (the purpose of both is to satisfy the need for safety and emotional support). The adult dynamics appears to have the same basis as infant attachment. Each of the partners, similarly to an infant, seeks for the attachment figure in stressful situations, feels safe when the other is nearby and responsive; for both the important other represents a secure base for active exploration of the environment, they both engage in close, intimate, bodily contact, both use the other one for reciprocal experience exchange,...) (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The authors described three different categories of behavior, emotional reactions and cognitive activity to maintain the feeling of safety in adult relations. The securely attached adults do not have problems with close intimacy relationship. They also do not have problems with depending on others when relations with their partner are reciprocal and trustful. In contrast, the avoidant adults are uncomfortable when being to close to others; they find it difficult to trust the others and are not relaxed when being to close to others. The avoidant adults often pretend to be self-efficient. The anxious-resistant adults want to merge with other persons, they are afraid of being abandoned, and frequently doubt about their partner's love (Crowell & Treboux, 1995; Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

In the mid-nineties the authors found out (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), that the occurrence of the avoidance behavior of adults could have been caused by more than one reason, mentioning their fear to be abandoned and keeping their independence as possible ones (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998). That is why the categorical models of attachment failed and

consequently, a new model was formed, defining attachment on the continuum of two dimensional models (the model of the self and the model of the other). Most of self-report instruments of attachment provide continuous scores on the two dimensions – the anxiety (personal fear of being abandoned, which is frequently connected with emotional regulation) and avoidance (personal distance of intimate closeness and dependency, which is important in personal behavior) (K. A. Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). The dimensional model of attachment anxiety and avoidance is closely connected with the Bartholomew and Horowitz model of self and the model of other (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The secure individuals have a low relationship anxiety and avoidance level, the preoccupied individuals have a high anxiety level and a low avoidance level, the dismissing individuals have a high avoidance level and low anxiety level while the fearfully attached adults have high relationship anxiety and also high relationship avoidance level (Kelly A. Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Tomec, 2005).

A great number of adult attachment researches offered different results about gender differences in attachment dimensions. Author Ibrahim Keklik (2004) proved the relationship avoidance was higher for men, while in case of the relationship anxiety the situation turned out to be the other way round – women reported to have higher attachment anxiety. The research carried out by Chris R. Fraley (2003) ascertained that there were no significant differences between genders when referring to the dimension of anxiety. In the case of the dimension of avoidance, women proved to have lower avoidance level than men. In general, both men and women had higher anxiety than avoidance level, although men were still reported to have higher avoidance level than women (C. R. Fraley, 2003; Keklik, 2004).

### **::1.3 Relationship satisfaction**

The studies examining the interrelationships between married couples' attachment styles, their level of self-disclosure, and marital satisfaction proved that the highest relationship satisfaction levels were typical for secure attached partners (Forness, 2003), while the highest dissatisfaction levels were more typical for wives in avoidant unions. Husbands were particularly negatively influenced by anxious-avoidant relationships, which led to increased withdrawal from the emotional demands of their wives (Maclean, 2002). The unsafe attachment style (preoccupied, dismissing, fearful) led to unrealistic low expectation with the relation, which resulted in lower relational satisfaction (Cobb, 2003). Women relationship satisfaction was mostly connected with low relational anxiety. At the same time women's anxiety was closely linked

to men's dissatisfaction in relationship. As an important mediator between the adult attachment and the relationship satisfaction, authors mention communicational skills, which proved to be more important for women (Feeney, 1994). Authors report on the importance of communication in adult relations (negative relationships between the attachment anxiety and avoidance and total accommodation; positive relationships between both attachment dimensions and demand-withdrawal behaviors). There were also inverse relationships found between both the attachment dimensions (insecure attachment) and marital satisfaction (Crowley, 2008).

Avoidance as the attachment dimension is a strong mediator indicating the relationship satisfaction and playing one of the main roles in partners' differentiation level (Lippitt, 2005). The examinations confirmed the same level of partner's differentiation and, in most cases, substantial accordance with relationship satisfaction and partners' attachment style (Ebenstein, 2005). The secure attachment style can be recognized through the feeling of safely and greater role balance (Marks, Huston, Johnson, & MacDermid, 2001).

Gender differences in relationship satisfaction were reported in many studies. Women were often less satisfied with relationships than men (Cunningham, et al., 1982; Fowers, 1991). Female relationship satisfaction is supposed to be connected with partners' support and relational equivalence (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994). Beside the adult attachment, communication skills, level of partners' differentiation and relationship equivalence the union satisfaction was regularly connected with ability to recognize and communicate emotions of self and partner. Women were more successful in communicating their own and their partners' emotions (Cordova, Gee, & Warren, 2005). A great number of factors should be taken into account when examining the connection between the adult attachment and the relationship satisfaction. Beside partner's personality, their differentiation level and communicational skills the surveys mention the negative affectivity as an important factor that should not be omitted when examining the relationship satisfaction and adult attachment (Davila, Bradbury, & Fincham, 1998).

The focus of our research was the relationship status as an important factor in connection to the adult attachment and relationship satisfaction. Based on the research of other authors (Bouchard, 2006; Brown & Booth, 1996; Evans & Kelley, 2004) we supposed marital partners to report higher relationship satisfaction than cohabitant partners (hypothesis 1). Similarly to the results, which have already been confirmed, (Brennom, 2001; Forness, 2003), we assumed marital pairs to report more secure attachment than cohabitant pairs (hypothesis 2). The connection between the high relationship satisfaction and the secure attachment in adult relations was also confirmed (Cobb, 2003;

Crowley, 2008; Maclean, 2002). In our research we focused on the attachment dimensions – anxiety and avoidance expressed in our partners' relationships. We assumed the low anxiety and avoidance (secure attachment) level to connect with the high relationship satisfaction (hypothesis 3).

## **::2.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **::2.1 Participants**

Participants were parents of primary school pupils. Data was collected from 265 pairs (530 participants) with at least one child, which represented 23 % of all included pairs (the questionnaires were given to 1156 pairs at the first place). The majority of parents were married (79 %), some of them were cohabitant (18 %), and the remaining were divorced or refused to answer the question.

The average age of male participants was between 41 and 50-years of age (59.2 %), with 30.6 % of men younger and 10.2 % older than the average. Female participants were younger than male (48.3 % of them were between 31 and 40 -years- old, 45.7 % were 41 between 50-years-old and the remaining were older).

Male educational structure was as follows: secondary education (27.9 %), university education (27.9 %), vocational education (25 %), and primary education (10 %); some of them had a doctor's degree. Female education structure was as follows: secondary education (41.1 %), university education (32.5 %), vocational education (approximately 14 %), primary education (8 %), and doctor's degree (4%).

### **::2.2 Measurements and procedure**

Each pair was given a pair of identical questionnaires at the parental meeting in primary school of their child. In order to ensure honesty, data were collected anonymously and partners were directed not to discuss their responses with each other until the forms were completed and returned. The questionnaires were returned to school in two separate postage-free envelopes. The study included 24 primary schools in northern and western Slovenia.

#### *Demographic and background information.*

Participants provided information regarding age, education and their marital status.



*Experience in Close Relationship – Revised; ECR-R (Chris R. Fraley & Waller, 1998; Chris R. Fraley, et al., 2000).*

ECR-R consists of 36 Likert type items (1 - strongly disagree, 7 – strongly agree), with half of them assessing attachment anxiety (18) and half of them assessing avoidance (18).

Test-retest reliability documented by many authors was high ( $\alpha = 0.94$  for Anxiety,  $\alpha = 0.95$  for Avoidance) (Chris R. Fraley, et al., 2000),  $\alpha = 0.94$  for Avoidance, and  $\alpha = 0.91$  for Anxiety, convergent validity was high as well (0.94 for Avoidance and 0.93 for Anxiety) (K. A. Brennan, et al., 1998).

Mean value for Anxiety was 3.46 (SD = 1.10), for Avoidance 2.93 (SD = 1.15) for normative sample (N = 1085)(Chris R. Fraley, et al., 2000). Reliability for Anxiety factor  $\alpha = 0.91$  and  $\alpha = 0.92$  for Avoidance (K. A. Brennan, et al., 1998; Chris R. Fraley, et al., 2000). In our research the reliability analysis showed  $\alpha = 0.85$  for Anxiety (men),  $\alpha = 0.90$  for Avoidance (men) and  $\alpha = 0.85$  for Anxiety (women) and  $\alpha = 0.90$  for Avoidance (women).

*Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale – KMS (Schumm, et al., 1986).*

The KMS is a three Likert type question test with a range of 1-7. The questions start with “How satisfied are you with...” and asks the participants about three main items: their relationship (their satisfaction with marriage), their relationship with their spouse, and their partner as a spouse (Jeong, Bollman, & Schumm, 1992). Relationship satisfaction is determinate as a sum of three main items of KMS.

Item means for normative sample were 6.21 (SD=0.84), 6.11 (SD=0.84) and 5.95 (SD=1.04). It was determined that cut-off score for KMS was 17 (Crane, Middleton, & Bean, 2000).

The reliability and internal consistency was tested by several authors (Schumm, et al., 1985; White, Stahmann, & Furrow, 1994). Test-retest reliability of KMS was high  $\alpha = 0.71$ . The KMS has excellent concurrent validity, significantly correlating with other self-reported questionnaires of relationship satisfaction as Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Quality Marriage Index (Mitchell, Newell, & Schumm, 1983; Schumm, et al., 1985).

The internal consistency of such a short scale was  $\alpha = 0.93$ . Our research confirmed high reliability of KMS ( $\alpha = 0.93$  for men and  $\alpha = 0.95$  for women).

### 3.0 RESULTS

*Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Adult Attachment (ECR-R).*

	M	Me	Mo	SD	Min	Max	KS	p
<b>Anxiety men</b>	2,53	2,39	1,00	,98	1,00	5,44	1,381	,044
<b>Avoidance men</b>	2,51	2,44	1,33	1,08	1,00	7,00	1,305	,066
<b>Anxiety women</b>	2,38	2,17	2,11	,93	1,00	5,33	1,747	,004
<b>Avoidance women</b>	2,32	2,11	1,33	1,04	1,00	6,17	1,691	,007

*Note: M – mean value, Me – median, Mo – mode, Min – the lowest value, Max – the highest value, KS – Kolmogorov Smirnov normality test, p – significance.*

Results indicate relatively low relationship avoidance and anxiety for both partners. Kolmogorov Smirnov normality test shows significantly lower results (in comparison to normal curve).

Attachment avoidance and anxiety were higher for men in comparison with women.

*Table 2: Descriptive Statistic of Marital satisfaction (KMS).*

	M	Me	Mo	SD	Min	Max	KS	p
<b>Satisfaction men</b>	18,43	19,00	21,00	2,91	9,00	21,00	3,499	,000
<b>Satisfaction women</b>	18,28	19,00	21,00	3,35	3,00	21,00	3,975	,000

*Note: M – mean value, Me – median, Mo – mode, Min – the smallest value, Max – the biggest value, KS – Kolmogorov Smirnov normality test, p – significance*

Results indicate high relationship satisfaction for both partners. Kolmogorov Smirnov normality test shows significantly higher results (in comparison to normal curve).

*Table 3: The comparison of Adult Attachment and Marital Satisfaction between partners.*

	MR	SR	Z	p
<b>Anxiety (men – women)</b>	129,5 108,7	17614,0 11306,0	-2,930	,003
<b>Avoidance (men – women)</b>	131,1 119,6	19921,0 11957,0	-3,439	,001

<b>Marital satisfaction (men – women)</b>	79,9	5997,0	-339	,735
	73,1	5631,0		

Note: MR – Mean Rank (Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test), SR – Sum of Ranks, Z – Rank discrepancy comparison, p – significance.

Nonparametric test (Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test) used in Table 3 shows significantly higher Attachment Anxiety and Attachment Avoidance for men compared with women. The results show there is no difference in marital or relationship satisfaction between partners.

Table 4: Comparison of Attachment and Marital Satisfaction of Marriage and Cohabitant Couples.

		N	MR	SR	Z	p
<b>Anxiety men</b>	Marriage	210	126,6	26711,0	-1,326	,185
	Cohabitant	48	142,6	6700,0		
<b>Avoidance men</b>	Marriage	210	125,7	26516,5	-1,747	,081
	Cohabitant	48	146,7	6894,5		
<b>Satisfaction men</b>	Marriage	210	136,8	28854,0	-3,453	,001
	Cohabitant	48	96,9	4557,0		
<b>Anxiety women</b>	Marriage	210	123,5	25942,0	-2,687	,007
	Cohabitant	48	155,6	7469,0		
<b>Avoidance women</b>	Marriage	210	118,0	24779,5	-5,180	,000
	Cohabitant	48	179,8	8631,5		
<b>Satisfaction women</b>	Marriage	210	137,5	28867,0	-3,719	,000
	Cohabitant	48	94,7	4544,0		

Note: N – Participant number, MR – Mean Rank (Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test), SR – Sum of Ranks, Z – Rank discrepancy comparison, p – significance.

The relationship satisfaction discrepancy between married and cohabitant men the same as discrepancy between married and cohabitant women is significant. The married couples proved to be more satisfied with the relationship than cohabitant.

The gender differences, shown in the Attachment factors, indicate that the Anxiety and Avoidance of married women are significantly lower than Anxiety and Avoidance of cohabitant women. The results indicate more secure attachment of married women.

The difference in attachment factors for married and cohabitant men are not significant. Results show that relationship of attachment factors and relationship satisfaction are not significant for men.

*Table 5: Nonparametric correlation (Spearman's rho) of Adult Attachment and Marital Satisfaction.*

		Anxiety Avoidance		Satisfaction		Anxiety Avoidance		Satisfaction	
		women	women	women	men	men	men	men	men
Anxiety	r	1,000	,729**	-,512**	,625**	,587**	-,414**		
	p	.	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>
Attach- ment	r		1,000	-,584**	,557**	,663**	-,480**		
	p		.	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>
Satisfaction	r			1,000	-,418**	-,461**	,599**		
	p			.	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>
Anxiety	r				1,000	,754**	-,582**		
	p				.	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>
Atta- chment	r					1,000	-,641**		
	p					.	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>
Satisfaction	r							1,000	
	p							.	

Note: \* p < ,05. \*\* p < ,001.

Results indicate strong negative correlations between relationship satisfaction and attachment factors (the couples proved to be securely attached and satisfied with their relationship).

Based on these results we can confirm a relatively high connection ( $r = .625$ ) for partners' attachment anxiety and even higher connection ( $r = .663$ ) for partners' attachment avoidance. Partners' connection in relationship satisfaction is high as well ( $r = .599$ ).

#### 4.0 DISCUSSION

The research focused on relationship satisfaction and adult attachment between married and cohabitant pairs. In order to detect differences in adult attachment, two dimensions of attachment-related anxiety and avoidance were employed. Results, applied to our sample, indicate relatively low attachment anxiety and avoidance rate if compared to the normative sample (the mean result of expressed attachment factors was approximately between 33 and 36 %) (C. R. Fraley, 2003; Keklik, 2004). Possible explanation for securely attached sample could be the high reduction of our sample, which consequently resulted in a higher number of securely attached and relationship satisfied pairs.

The reported low attachment related-anxiety and avoidance rate, in com-

parison to the rate set by other authors (Keklik, 2004; Kelley, Cash, Grant, Miles, & Santos, 2004; Santa-Maria, 2003), suggests that securely attached partners have positive self-esteem and positive reciprocal relations to the spouse. The difference between secure and not secure attachment was based on the cut-off 4, which applied to expressed attachment anxiety and avoidance (Santa-Maria, 2003). High percentage of married pairs (79 %), relatively low percentage of cohabitant partners (18 %), percentage of divorced partners (1 %), or the number of those, married more than once (0.5 %) is another factor indicating the selection of the sample. Attachment related anxiety rate proved to be higher than avoidance rate among both, male and female participants, while the differences in anxiety rate between men and women were not significant. High anxiety is often expressed as the fear of abandonment, which leads to low self-confidence and self-competence, while the high avoidance results in negative opinion about others, fear of intimacy and rejection of being depended on others. The avoidance factor influences personal behavior, while the attachment anxiety mostly affects personal emotional functioning (Tomec, 2005). When comparing attachment factors between men and women, we can conclude women are more securely attached than men. For men, higher anxiety and avoidance rates are reported and thus we believe men are more insecure about themselves, they have a stronger desire to escape from emotionally stressful situations, are weaker in expressing their true emotions and try harder to flee from emotional disclosure to their partner. When discussing gender differences in attachment factors, we should not forget to mention the temperamental and personal differences between men and women, which are inevitable when talking about attachment behavior. In our research we excluded all the genetic and environmental influences on adult attachment and relationship satisfaction.

Relationship satisfaction (compared with cut-off score = 17) proved to be high in both examined groups, that is male and female (Crane, et al., 2000). Results indicate that partners trust each other and that they have positive opinion about the particular type of relationship, although the form of a relationship they usually refer to is marriage. When comparing these results with the results of other authors (Cunningham, et al., 1982; Fowers, 1991), our research showed a higher level of women relationship satisfaction. Another reason for high women relationship satisfaction is women's socially desired way of answering, which is not very persuasive due to securely attached women. Women who show high relationship satisfaction receive strong support of their partners, emotional closeness and understanding (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994). Due to high relationship satisfaction, typical for both partners, we can conclude that partners in our sample are able to disclose to

each other emotionally, to trust and share emotional pain with each other, are able to communicate their needs, and have a feeling of being understood in relationship (Cordova, et al., 2005).

Despite high relationship satisfaction of both genders, we found significant differences in relationship satisfaction when comparing married and cohabitant pairs. Marital status proved to be an important factor in examining relationship satisfaction, as the relationship satisfaction level was higher in case of marital pairs than in case of cohabitant pairs. Our results the same as the results of many other authors (Brown & Booth, 1996; Cannon, 1999) confirmed higher emotional loyalty and relational closeness of married pairs that indicate higher level of trust and experience higher level of safety in marital relationships compared to cohabitant pairs. The results confirm the hypothesis 1, that is married couples are more satisfied with the relationship than cohabitant couples.

Medium to high correlations of attachment related anxiety and avoidance of partners in the same couple show appropriate reciprocal agreement and lead to equal differentiation and personality development inside the couple, which was also confirmed by other authors (Lippitt, 2005). Results indicate that criteria for relationship satisfaction should be relatively equal for both partners in the couple. The harmony in the participating couples provides the proof of interacting frankness and possibility to be vulnerable to each other. High correlations between relationship satisfaction and secure attachment of partners (low anxiety and avoidance) was confirmed in our and previous research (Cobb, 2003; Haseley, 2007). Satisfied and secure attached partners are those who are able to solve their problems in a constructive way, manage to speak for themselves inside the relationship, exceed the relationship stress and have developed mature identity. We should also not ignore the personality and environmental components which may contribute to relationship satisfaction and adult attachment of partners (for example divorce standpoints, sex role rigidity, tradition, financial independency of partners ...) but were not the subject of our research. With high correlation between low attachment factors and relationship' satisfaction we confirmed hypothesis 3. Securely attached partners in our sample were more satisfied with the relationship compared to not securely attached partners. The important factor we should not be careless of is the cultural background of participants. Slovenia is the small country in Europe, where traditional legacy is still very strong. Marriage is the symbol of love, belonging and loyalty, while cohabitation is still not admitted as equal relationship status. The marriage and cohabitation is equal at the national level but not in people opinion. The majority of Slovene inhabitants are Catholic, that may result in higher acceptance of marriage

compare to cohabitation and more positive opinion of traditional religious relationship status (as marriage certainly is).

Satisfaction and also secure attachment indicate high self esteem level of participants, low fear of abandonment, a good chance of vulnerability disclosure, mental well being and constructive problem solving of the participants (Cordova, et al., 2005). Because the importance of marriage from moral, emotional, psychosocial (connectedness and feelings of belonging, confidence, competence and admiration) and financial point of view we proposed, marital partners would be more securely attached than cohabitant partners (K. Kompan Erzar, 2006). Marriage often means much more to women than men; women experience marriage in a more emotional way, they have high expectations of marriage and are later less satisfied with their marriage than men (Cunningham, et al., 1982). High expectations lead women to invest more energy in marriage, which correlates with higher marriage burnout, defined as physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion (Pines, 1987). The results of our research referring to men in the sample were not a surprise. The results show that married and cohabitant men do not differ in reporting the attachment related anxiety and avoidance. In contrast, there is a significant difference in expressed anxiety and avoidance of married and cohabitant women. Married women are more securely attached than cohabitant women. We can confirm that marital status is more important for women than men, that women experience marriage more deeply and that marriage may be the reflection of women's mental structure and its effect on women's judgment about themselves and about others. Marriage and the decision to marry is believed to be the consequence of women's rational decision (Huffman, Chang, Rausch, & Schaffer, 1994), which implies specific personality structure, specific experience in establishing relationships and searching for secure base in adult interactions (Bowlby, 1975; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). To summarize the results, we cannot confirm the hypothesis 2, which suggests that there are more securely attached married men and women than cohabitant pairs. The connection between secure attachment and marital status relates only to women in our sample.

### **::Implication for future research**

The research shows how important the decision on marriage is for an adult pair. Despite the fact that marriage is considered to be a solid union in which partners' experience the feeling of trust and belonging to each other, it still implicates higher relationship satisfaction than cohabitant relationship. Hesitation whether to marry or not is more typical for women, because they

associate marriage with higher self-confidence, trustfulness and lower fear of abandonment.

For future research it would be interesting to comprise different research methods (observing, interviewing and self-reporting) and more personal and environmental components of the participants, for example their views on marriage, parenting styles in partners' family of the origin, partners' religion beliefs, duration of the relationship, cultural tradition possible mental health problems of the partners, etc.)

### **::Limitation of the study**

Despite persuasive results, we should not make conclusions without considering the limitations of the study. Substantial reduction of the sample (23 % completed and returned questionnaires) which mostly consisted of married couples (79 % of the sample), consequently led to more positive experience in partners' relationships. Another limitation was insufficient research method, as with self-report data it is difficult to avoid socially desired answers. Questionnaires were completed at participants' home, which is why reciprocal interactions between partners, who should answer the questions individually, could not be avoided. However, it should be emphasized that marital status is just one of many other important factors that define individual differences in adult attachment and relationship satisfaction. Important limitation was also making conclusions on marital status, attachment factors and relationship satisfaction only, without considering personality and socio-psychological, environmental, and financial factors of the participants.



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