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## Age difference and its effect on the marital adjustment: analytical psychological reading

الفارق العمري وتأثيره على التوافق الزواجي قراءة نفسية تحليلية

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### Abstract:

This study aims at revealing the extent of the effect of the age difference on the marital adjustment because it is one of important factors. To do so, we started from the following problematic: does the age difference affect the marital adjustment? In this regard, we relied on the analytical descriptive method and tried to shed light on the concept of the age difference. Besides, we analyze the theoretical background of the age difference between the couple, the psychological introduction, the cultural constructivist introduction, and the social introduction. Moreover, we referred to the marital adjustment from an Islamic perspective.

**Key words:** age difference; marital adjustment; marriage

**الملخص:**

تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى الكشف عن مدى تأثير الفارق العمري على التوافق الزواجي باعتباره عامل من عوامل التوافق الزواجي، انطلاقنا من الإشكالية التالية: هل يؤثر الفارق العمري على التوافق الزواجي؟ .

اعتمدنا على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، ومن خلال ما سبق سنحاول تسليل الضوء على هذا العامل من خلال تحديد مفهومه، تحليل المداخل النظرية لفارق العمري بين الزوجين، المدخل النفسي، المدخل البنائي الثقافي، المدخل الاجتماعي، والإشارة الى التوافق الزواجي من منظور إسلامي.  
**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الفارق العمري، التوافق الزواجي، الزواج.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Marriage is a social and biological need for humans. It is the basis of the family and the frame made by God for the continuity of the humankind. In this regard, the marital adjustment represents one of the manifestations of the stable marital life and the positive social interaction between the couple. In addition, it is a mutual relationship between two people who have independent characters with positives and negatives according to the view of the partner. The choice of the partner is a crucial factor in the achievement of the marital adjustment, the stable familial life, happiness, and psychological well-being.

The age adjustment is one of the fields of the marital adjustment. Felata points out that the compatibility of the couple's age is one of the factors that contribute to the adjustment because the close ages create mutual understanding of the partner's interests in the situations they face in life (Felata, 2008, p. 21). Some researchers found out that the possibility of the success of the marriage could be guaranteed if the age difference does not exceed 2 or 3 years, and the husband is the older. This view is not absolute as (Sherbini, 2000, p. 149) states that the big difference in the ages of the couple negatively affects the sexual relation between them because when one of them is an older adult, the other is still in adulthood or youth.

This leads to sexual maladjustment and, thus, a trouble in the marital relation.

**Problematic:**

The age adjustment is a vital requirement for the marital adjustment. Researchers have many views in this field. Some see that it is better that the husband is older than the wife to manage the familial issues. In this line, the husband can see the wife who is older than him as dominant; this may contribute to the success or failure of the relation. In addition, it requires a high degree of psychological adjustment for the two people, as there are many cases of successful marriage where the wife is older than the husband such as the marriage of the Prophet Mohamed peace be upon him to Khadija (Ismail, 2011, p. 509). According to the study of Kamel, the age adjustment is one of the factors that lead to the marital adjustment. The couple must have close ages and the husband must be 4-8 years older than the wife in order to have convergent thinking and interests and common dreams and aspirations (Kamel, 2012, p. 77).

Many studies attempted to reveal the relation between the age difference between the couple and the marital adjustment to identify the suitable difference for the marital adjustment. Al Khtetna identified 03 basic elements of marriages based on the age difference and the role played by each partner as follows:

- The mother wife: she is generally older than the husband. She contains and takes care of him.
- The friend wife: she is close in age and, thus, the relation is equivalent and lean to friendship. Each one takes care of the other.
- The daughter wife: she is many years younger than the husband. Thus, he treats her as his daughter and

overcomes her mistakes; she is happy with this (Al Khtetna).

Al Fahdi sees that these types are positive models that clarify the marital adjustment regardless the age difference. On the other hand, some studies found out negative results and that the economic side is one of the obstacles in front of the marital adjustment in the light of the age difference (Al Fahdi, 2010, p. 60). According to Sana, the convergent ages make the inclinations and the ideas similar. However, when the age difference is big, this becomes hard (Al Khuli, 1994, p. 160). This had been proven by the study of Al Shemaci, which found out a statistically significant relation between the variables of the age of the couple, the educational level of the wife, the family income, the marriage method, the relation with the family of the husband or the wife, the sexual relation, and the meaning of marriage for the wife. In addition, the study did not find any significant relation between the age of the wife and the age difference between the couple, the difference in the educational level, the number of children, the nature of the housing, the period of knowing each other, and the marital satisfaction (Al Shemaci, 2004, p. 77).

There are other studies with opposite views. The study of Al Sayad shows that studies neither proved the existence of a relation between the convergence in the ages of the couple and the marital adjustment nor between the big difference between the ages of the couple and the marital sadness. However, it is better that the husband is 01 to 10 years older than the wife as the divorce chances increase when the wife is older than the husband, or the latter is more than 10 years older (Al Sayad, 202, p. 58). In this vein, the study of (Belmihoub, 2010) found out a statistically significant relation between the marital stability and the period of engagement, age, educational level,

the good economic level, the relation between the parents, the relation with the mother, the relation with the father, the job, the independent house, and the good relation with the family of the husband. In return, the study proved the absence of statistically significant relation between the marital adjustment and the age when marriage, the age difference between the couple, the method of getting to know each other, and the religious commitment.

Besides, the sexual relation and affection play a role in the success of the marital relation as shown by the study of Amel who found out that the degree of the adjustment differs according to the real satisfaction of the emotional needs, the age of the couple, and the scientific qualifications of the couple. (Amel, 2009, p. 65). The studies about the age difference and the marital adjustment show positive and negative effects. This pushed us to investigate this issue to find out more about it. Furthermore, many studies show that the choice problem and the age difference between the couple are among the factors of the marital maladjustment. The study of (Kerdasha, 2002) shows that the age differences between the couple in Jordan lean for the husbands and that the difference is between (1-10) years. In addition, the study of (Al Sharifayn, 2003) found statistically significant differences in the marital adjustment according to the intellectual convergence. Moreover, the study of (Bilal, 2013) showed that there is a statistically significant relation between the marital adjustment and the age difference on behalf of the couples whose age difference does not exceed 04 years; in this line, the marital adjustment decreases when the difference exceeds 09 years.

Due to the many problems resulting from the maladjustment inside the Algerian society (in the city of Oran) due to the different concepts of life by the couple (philosophy of

life) resulting from the age difference, the author seeks knowing the effect of the age difference on the marital adjustment through the following question: how does the age difference affect the marital adjustment? This is what we shall answer through the analysis:

**Aims:**

- Knowing the nature of the marital adjustment.
- Providing a scientific contribution about the topic.
- Knowing the relation between the marital adjustment and the age difference.

**Importance:**

**Theoretical importance:** This topic is one of the important topics in familial psychology as it has implications on the life of the individual and the society. The study draws its importance from its relation with the family and the marital life. Besides, it deals with the marital adjustment that is a basis for the familial and social construction.

**Practical importance:** This study can add to the efficiency of the programs of the familial and marital counseling thanks to the possibility of measuring the conformity of the mutual perceptions of the needs of the other. In addition, it provides information about the dynamics of the marital relations and the factors of better understanding and harmony between the couple. Moreover, it helps the experts of the marital counselling set programs that help couples overcome the hardships they face.

**2.The concept of the age difference:**

It is defined as the variation between the ages of the couple, be it for the husband or the wife. This variable can be measured through :

The age deference between the couple= the age of the husband- the age of the wife) (Al Khalifa, 1995, p. 55).

Besides, it is defined as that difference between the age of the husband and the wife that exceeds 14 years, where the husband is older. From these definitions, the age difference is generally on behalf of the husband in most of the societies.

### **2.2Age adjustment:**

Ali sees that the wide difference in age may represent an obstacle in the adjustment of the couple due to the different life experiences, training, level of maturity, and the degree of the family responsibility between the partners. Some sociologists identify it based on the effects resulting from this difference. Some social studies see that the +14 years difference is the one where negative effects are seen unlike the relations where the difference is less (Ali, 2004, p. 55). Hence, there are different definitions for the age difference.

### **2.3The age difference between the couple: an Islamic vision:**

God allowed marriage and made it a mercy for his servants. In addition, the Prophet Mohamed peace be upon him incited people for marriage when they are able to as it helps maintain chastity. The choice of the partner is one of the most important phases of building the familial life. Thus, the good choice is the first correct step for a stable and happy life and helps achieve the benefits and goals of marriage. In addition, it helps build a coherent family. The marital life is a relation of harmony, adjustment, ideas, goals, and concepts. It is a union in the entire field all along the life where the couple share the ups and downs. Hence, it is necessary to have an understanding and equivalence in the light of the marital life. With the equivalence, we refer to the convergence in the age phase, educational level, and adjustment in the sociocultural life. Thus, these points make basic pillars for a stable marital relation. On the other hand, the difference in the core of the relation creates negative

psychological results that lead to tensions, contradictions, and the failure of the family or the non-achievement of the goals.

The marital life that is based on the equivalence witnesses respect, understanding, and the harmony of ideas. This contributes to the affection and love and, thus, facing crises. Besides, it guarantees the familial stability and coherence. In this line, if the age difference is not big, it leads to convergence in ideas, aspirations, and skills. Furthermore, mental and cognitive growth shall be convergent and balanced, and vice versa. When one partner reaches the phase of the satisfaction of the aspirations and lusts, the other may be in the top vitality and openness to the world physical and emotional needs. Thus, it is better to have a convergence in the age phase on behalf of the husband as females reach puberty before men and their fertility stops before the mens'. Thus, I see that the difference of (04-10) years may be acceptable.

Islam sees that the choice of the partner must be based on equivalence that is one of the factors of the success of the marital relation. This was encouraged by the prophet Mohamed peace be upon him who recommended choosing the good competent partners. In this line, Islam provides the concept of equivalence as a factor that guarantees the continuity of marriage. In addition, Islam sees people as equal and that the best of them is the more pious. However, despite Islam provides for equality, it encourages equivalence in the families so that they do not have much difference in traditions, thinking styles, behavior, mood, and tastes.

In addition, Al Massiri points out that equivalence between the couple is the basis. Nevertheless, Islam allows marriages that are not equivalent as long as the husband is able to afford the expenditures and has good manners. In this line, the Prophet Mohamed peace be upon him had married Aicha who

had been 45 years younger and Khadija who was 15 years older. Besides, Omar had married Om Kalthoum the daughter of Ali Bin Abi Taleb who had been many years younger (Al Massiri, 2006, p. 430). Besides, Yekhlef adds that Islamic scholars considered the competence as a main condition in marriage because the unified interests and inclinations of the couple guarantee the relation. This cannot be achieved unless there are balanced and equivalent partners. In addition, they did not consider the age equivalence as one of the marriage conditions except some scholars from the Shafii School who saw the age equivalence as part of the competence as the old adult is not the equivalent of the young lady. In this context, there is no Hadith or Quranic verse that prohibits marriage when there is an age difference (Yekhlef, 2015, p. 375).

It is likely that the medical, social, and psychological aims behind the fear of the age difference between the couple are (Al Keridis, 2012, p. 2006):

1. The big variation in the sexual ability: despite that the husband keeps able to make love for a longer time than the wife, his old age affects his sexual ability and energy.
  2. The care about children and their issues cannot be achieved well if the husband is very old. In addition, the big age difference negatively affects the styles of treating children.
  3. The age difference between the couple creates a psychological, social, and mental barrier that may negatively affect the understanding, harmony, and the familial and marital relationship.
- 3. The theoretical introductions for the age difference between the couple:**

The literatures about this topic show more than 03 distinct introductions that attempt to provide interpretations to the age difference between the couple (Al Khalifa, 1995, p. 38).

### **3.1The psychological introduction:**

Supporters of this introduction see that the men's inclination to the younger women results from their refusal to advance in age. It is a stage of psychological maturity. On the other hand, the man's inclination to older women may be to make up for the maternity feelings and warmth he misses, and to show the others that he is wanted. As for the wife, she is very fearful and wants a man who can protect her and help avoid the psychological effects of not getting married or not having children (Al Ashekar, 2010, p. 532). Thus, the cause of the marriage is the need of the partners to each other and for internal psychological needs.

### **3.2The culture constructivist introduction:**

This introduction sees the age difference between the couple as a reflection of the traditions and norms dictated by the cultural construction of the society. In the patriarchal societies, the age difference is generally on behalf of the husband. Some researchers explain this with the traditions that confirm the domination of the father. Besides, marriages with big age differences are widespread in such societies. In addition, there are societies that oblige the woman to get married regardless the age difference mainly those societies that witness marriages of the minor girls due to the traditions and religious dictations that confirm the entire dominance of the father over the family issues, and the complete submission of the wife.

In addition, Al Ibrahim adds that the patriarchal system is characterized with the intervention of the family members in the process of selecting the wife in an absolute way that the individual cannot refuse their decisions. In this regard, the

family's satisfaction is the most important dimension guaranteed by this system. Besides, it insists on the socioeconomic considerations as it does not give any importance to love, intimate relations, or the individual abilities because parents believe that love comes after marriage gradually, not before it (Al Ibrahim, 2007, p. 15). Furthermore, the sociocultural theories (harmony, spatial excess, and the personal values and attraction) see that the sociocultural factor is the most important factor that affects the process of selecting the partner (Al Ibrahim, 2007 p. 16).

Thus, we see that those who relate have kind of correlation due to the reflection of the traditions and norms of the patriarchal system. In order for the marital adjustment to emerge, the husband must be older than the wife.

### **3.3The social introduction:**

It agrees with the sociocultural introduction in general in the importance of the culture of the society in the interpretation of the age difference between the couple. However, it differs regarding the focus on the importance of the social situation of the partners, mainly the woman. With the decrease of the social roles of the woman, the age difference increases in a way that leans towards shrinking until the difference becomes on behalf of the woman. In this context, the woman's need for security and stability obliges her to choose an older man whom she sees able to afford the responsibility.

The supporters of this introduction focus mainly on the phenomenon of modernization that penetrated most of the contemporary societies and widened the opportunities of education for women and, thus, directly led to delaying the age of marriage until getting a certain level of education. Besides, education paved the way for the woman to work outside the house and get a material revenue that rid her of the economic

dependence and guaranteed her an independence that enables her to choose a man who does not have big difference in age to have better coexistence, understanding, and familial stability.

Moreover, Al Kacem sees that the shift towards the education of the girl encouraged her to carry on studies and refuse marriage until finishing studies. In addition, the girl has no interest but studying and getting higher degrees and a job that guarantees the economic independence (Al Kacem, 2010, p. 306). The supporters of this school give importance to the high number of divorces as an outcome of the age difference between the partners. They see that the marriages between a divorced person and a never-married partner witness a high age difference mainly in the societies where the divorcee rates are high and there are no values that diminish the status of the divorced. On the other hand, the age difference decreases in the relations where the partners marry for the first time. According to this introduction, the age that directly suits the education, work, and previous marital situation of the woman or man is a basic variable in interpreting the age difference between the partners as it is expected that the age difference reduces with the increase of the age of the woman when engaging (Al Khalifa, 1995, p. 40). The decrease of the social role of the woman is one of the causes that determine the age difference because the more the social roles of the woman decrease, the more the difference increases.

#### **4. CONCLUSION :**

Based on what has been said, we see that the difference in age is a recurrent thing in the couples' lives. The schools that interpreted the age difference are many. However, the woman always needs an older man to feel secure and stable. Nevertheless, the big difference creates a maladjustment because each one is living a phase with (physical, mental, psychological,

social, and spiritual) characteristics. The marital adjustment is a relative thing that depends on the social, economic, cultural, and sexual adjustments. Therefore, we find adjusted partners with a big age difference or a woman who is older than the husband and still the couple is adjusted. To sum up. The age adjustment may negatively affect the marital adjustment. Then, we must take many points into consideration as follows:

- Providing the marital counseling at the level of the governmental institutions to enable the families from acquiring mechanisms that help achieve the familial stability and marital adjustment and raise socially and psychologically stable children. In addition, it aims at helping youths acquire the skills to choose the suitable partner and make the decisions related to marriage.
- Making seminars and training sessions for the youths as a first step to promote the results of the scientific research and prepare the youths to get married with a focus on the suitable age difference.
- Establishing more centers of marital counseling that are rare, if not completely absent in Algeria. These centers help the youths make good choices according to the findings of studies related to this topic.

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