

## ***The Mediating Role of Sexual Function in the Relationship between Sensation-seeking, Gender Role Conflict, and Novelty-Seeking in Married Men in Bushehr (Iran) in 2020***

Kimia Zarei<sup>1</sup>, Masoud Shahbazi<sup>2\*</sup>, Amin Koraei<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Counseling, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Department of Counseling, Masjed Soleiman Branch, Islamic Azad University, Masjed Soleiman, Iran

***\*Corresponding Author Address:*** Masjed Soleiman Branch, Islamic Azad University, Masjed Soleiman, Iran

***Tel:*** 0098-9173733106

***Email:*** masoudshahbazi166@gmail.com

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** Potential problems among couples can negatively impact the lives of the family.

**Objectives:** The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between sensation-seeking, gender role conflict, and novelty-seeking in married men with the mediating role of sexual function.

**Methods:** This was a correlational study performed by path analysis. The statistical population comprised all married men in Bushehr (Iran) who visited marriage counseling centers in 2020. A total of 384 married men were selected as the sample using convenience sampling. The research tools included the Zuckerman Sensation-seeking Scale-V, the Gender Role Conflict Scale, Justification for Extramarital Involvement Questionnaire (JEIQ), and the Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale-Erectile Functioning (SSES-E). Data were analyzed by the Pearson correlation method and structural equation modeling (SEM).

**Results:** Based on demographic results, the mean (SD) of the age of participants was 45.29 (6.37) years. The results revealed a significant relationship between sensation-seeking and sexual function, and between sensation and novelty-seeking in men ( $p < 0.001$ ). There was also a causal relationship between sensation-seeking and novelty-seeking mediated by sexual function in men ( $P = 0.004$ ). The findings also revealed a significant relationship between gender role conflict and sexual function as well as novelty-seeking ( $p < 0.001$ ), and a significant relationship between gender role conflict and novelty-seeking mediated by sexual function in men ( $P = 0.012$ ).

**Conclusion:** According to the results, the proposed model had adequate fitness. Male sensation-seeking and gender role conflict lead to numerous problems for men, spouses, the family, and society.

**Keywords:** *sensation, gender, conflict, psychological, exploratory behavior, sexual behavior, men's health*

### **Introduction**

The family serves a variety of functions, including sexual behavior regulation; however, failing to meet the pre-requisites of this function may lead to sexual deviations such as novelty-seeking. Novelty-seeking refers to a state in which people are not constant in different dimensions of their lives, whether family-related, emotional, or social, and demonstrate a strong tendency for constant change in these aspects. Sexual novelty-seeking is the sexual motivation affecting sexual relations

and marital functioning, regarded as a personality trait or inclination predisposing the person to marital infidelity [1]. Sexual novelty-seeking often leads to extra-marital or unconventional and secret romantic/sexual relations. There are different states to sexual novelty-seeking. One state includes emotional involvement without sexual relations; another state entails sexual relations without emotional involvement; and yet another state is a combination of the two. In the latter case, novelty-seeking is a sexual as well as

emotional involvement and harms marriage more than the other two states. Novelty-seeking involves physical, sexual, or only emotional intimacy with a person other than the spouse that harms the marital relationship [2]. All forms of sexual novelty-seeking share one characteristic, which is their secretive nature. Following the rise in sexual novelty-seeking, different theories have attempted to provide a clear explanation for the tendency to sexual novelty-seeking, especially in men. The cognitive model is a dynamic integrated model that has proved useful for explaining psychosocial problems and disorders in recent years. According to this theory, due to the nature of cognition, some people act immoderately when meeting their needs (especially sexual needs) and seeking confirmation, or have many sexual relations to avoid dealing with their intense and negative emotions. Supporting this view, evidence reveals that marital novelty-seeking predisposes sex convicts to committing rape [3] and people with compulsive sexual relations to sex addiction [4].

Novelty-seeking is affected by sexual function, which refers to the body's response through different stages of the sexual response cycle (excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution) [5]. In other words, sexual function refers to a relationship involving love-making or intercourse [6]. It is a multidimensional phenomenon affected by various biological, psychosocial, and social factors [7]. Sexual dysfunction, therefore, could be due to psychological and physical factors; when there are physical causes for sexual dysfunction, psychological factors may play a secondary role in complicating the situation and lead to deficits in sexual response and dysfunction [8]. Sexual function is correlated with sexual and non-sexual components, e.g., the length of marriage, the spouse's feedback, marital adjustment, overall marital relationship, orgasm, frequency of intercourse, and the couple's sexual harmony. The factors influencing the couple's mental health in their marital life include satisfactory sexual desires and functions that comprise physiological, psychological, developmental, and sexual response dimensions [9]. Couples' tendency to extramarital relations is significantly correlated with their emotional security and sexual function [10].

According to some studies, these tendencies could be partly due to sensation-seeking. Sensation-seeking is defined as the need for diverse, complex, novel, and unprecedented experiences and feelings and a desire to take risks. It also focuses on the need for new and diverse experiences [11]. Emotion and emotion regulation are proposed as the etiology of sex addiction which, itself, is a mechanism for mood regulation. Various studies have noted the role of sensation-seeking in having numerous sexual partners [12]. The couples' degree of sensation-seeking is a personality trait that can influence their marital relations [13]. In fact, sensation-seeking as an emotion-related personality trait is significant in marital relations, with tangible and undeniable impacts on married couples' emotional relationship. Marital problems are largely affected by the couples' degree of sensation-seeking, and these two variables are correlated in different dimensions [14]. The literature posits a significant positive relationship between sensation-seeking and novelty-seeking [15].

One of the roles acquired within the family is the gender role, defined as the society's expectations of activities and behaviors appropriate/inappropriate for men and women. In addition to distinct household/social responsibilities and tasks assigned to each gender, gender roles expected different personality and behavioral traits of men and women (e.g., emotional and tolerant behavior in women, and aggressive and calculating behavior in men) [16]. Efforts to adhere to social norms often lead to negative outcomes with physical and mental consequences for men, which are reflected in many aspects of their lives, including their family, work, and intimate relationships. Gender role conflict occurs when men fail to reach a compromise with gender role norms, or when stereotypical gender expectations restrict or reduce their or others' values [17]. Men try to perform the expected gender roles while disregarding their possible negative impacts. Based on the gender role conflict model, roles that restrict the process of socialization are acquired in patriarchal and traditional societies and harm both women and men [18]. Recent studies indicate that the spouses of men who have gender role conflict experience less marital satisfaction and more depression and anxiety. Gender role conflict in

men is, therefore, riddled with intra- and interpersonal consequences that disrupt the family's function [19]. Marital infidelity increases with gender conflicts [20]. It has been shown that male gender role conflict increases criticism in marital relations [21].

Sensation-seeking and gender role conflict may predict novelty-seeking in men. Accordingly, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between sensation-seeking, gender role conflict, and novelty-seeking in married men with the mediating role of sexual function in Bushehr (Iran).

## Methods

### Design and participants

This was a correlational study performed by path analysis. The statistical population comprised all married men in Bushehr (Iran) in 2020. A total of

384 married men were selected as the sample using convenience sampling. In the current study, there was a total of 31 observed variables ( $31 \times 10 + 50 = 360$ ). Accordingly, to reduce sampling error, 410 married men participated in this research and received the questionnaires. After eliminating the distorted questionnaires, 384 married men were included in the study. In the present study, participants were identified by referring to specialized psychology and counseling clinics in Bushehr. Married men aged 20-60 years who were willing to participate and had not received therapy or marital training were included. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the questionnaires were provided to the participants through online platforms, and the response time to the questionnaires was 60 minutes. The theoretical model of the research is presented in Figure 1.

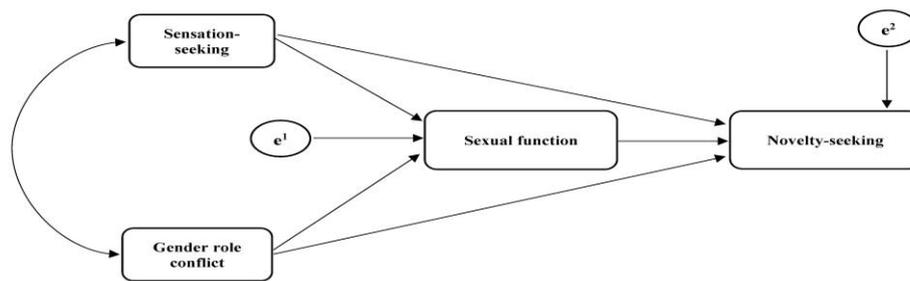


Figure 1: The Theoretical Model of the Research

### Demographic Survey Questions:

In the present study, a researcher-made demographic survey questionnaire with closed items was used to collect demographic information of the participants. The questions of this questionnaire were prepared to collect data related to age, education, employment status, number of children, and duration of the marriage.

### The Zuckerman Sensation-seeking Scale-V:

The Zuckerman Sensation-seeking Scale-V (short form) comprises 14 items evaluating the respondent's tendency to engage in risky activities. The questions have two options (A and B) scored as 0 and 1 [22]. Mahvi Shirazi [23], reported the reliability of this scale equal to 0.83 based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.84 for the scale.

### The Gender Role Conflict Scale:

This scale was developed by O'Neil et al. to assess the level of conflict experienced by men due to their adherence to social gender expectations. This scale assesses to what extent men conform to socialize gender roles. It includes 37 items scored on a six-point Likert scale (from 1= totally disagree to 6 = totally agree), with higher scores denoting higher levels of gender role conflict. The minimum and maximum scores are respectively 37 and 222 [24]. In the present study, items 16 and 20 were removed due to their cultural load, and eventually, 35 items remained. Rajabi et al. [25], reported the reliability of this scale equal to 0.86 based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.91 for the scale.

**Justification for extramarital involvement questionnaire (JEIQ):**

This 17-item questionnaire was developed by Glass and Wright to measure the justifications for extramarital relationships. The items are responded to and scored on a five-point Likert scale. Sharifi et al. [26], reported the reliability of this questionnaire equal to 0.94 based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.88 for the questionnaire.

**The Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale-Erectile Functioning (SSES-E):**

This 25-item scale was developed based on the Goals for Sex Therapy and the Erectile Difficulty Questionnaire. The items are scored on a five-point scale from "very high" (5) to "very low" (1), and the score ranges from 25 to 125. Higher scores indicate higher erectile confidence, competence, and potency. This scale allows spouses to consistently measure their sexual function and beliefs in men's self-confidence. Rajabi et al. [27] reported the questionnaire's acceptable construct validity and Cronbach's alpha of 0.91, 0.85, 0.86, 0.82, and 0.86 for the entire scale and the components of having intercourse without fear or anxiety, maintaining

an erection during intercourse, confidence in sexual function, orgasm, and regaining an erection, respectively [27]. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.88 for the scale.

**Statistical analyses**

Data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation coefficient. The skewness and kurtosis were utilized to specify the data normality. To evaluate the fitness of the model, the indices including Comparative Fit Index (CFI) (>0.90), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) (>0.90), Adjusted Goodness-Of-Fit Index (AGFI) (>0.85), Incremental Fit Index (IFI) (>0.90), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) (>0.90), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) (>0.08) were used [28]. The path analysis was used to assess the proposed model. SPSS version-24 and AMOS-24 were further used for analyzing the data

**Results**

The participants included 384 married men, aged 45.29 (6.37) years old. The demographic variables of the participants are shown in Table 1.

*Table 1: Demographic Variables of the Participants?*

	Variable	n (%)
Age (years)	21-30	61 (15.90)
	31-40	163 (42.40)
	41-50	127 (33.10)
	51-60	33 (8.60)
Education	High school education	118 (30.73)
	College education	266 (69.27)
Duration of the marriage (years)	1-5	66 (17.20)
	6-10	97 (25.30)
	11-15	141 (36.70)
	16 years and more	80 (20.80)
Number of children	1-2	221 (57.55)
	3-4	127 (33.07)
	5-6	36 (9.36)
Employment status	Employee	144 (37.50)
	Freelance	159 (41.40)
	Unemployed	81 (21.10)

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation (SD), minimum and maximum scores, kurtosis, and

skewness. The kurtosis and skewness of all the variables fell in the -2 to +2 range.

**Table 2: Mean (SD), Skewness, Kurtosis, and Minimum and Maximum Scores Among the Research Variables**

Variables	Mean (SD)	Min.	Max.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Sensation-seeking	7.03 (2.81)	1	14	-0.17	-0.14
Gender role conflict	87.90 (21.32)	43	146	0.14	-0.28
Sexual function	72.18 (13.04)	36	111	-0.03	0.04
Novelty-seeking	39.47 (8.24)	22	63	-0.15	-0.45

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix of the variables. All the correlation coefficients were significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). The results of the Pearson correlation coefficient revealed that there was a significant relationship between all the research variables ( $P < 0.05$ ) (Table 3). According to Table 3, there was a significant relationship between sensation-seeking and gender role conflict

( $r = 0.53$ ), sexual function ( $r = 0.45$ ), novelty-seeking, and ( $r = 0.71$ ). The relationship between gender role conflict and sexual function ( $r = 0.40$ ) and novelty-seeking ( $r = 0.65$ ) was significant. Moreover, there was a significant relationship between sexual function and novelty-seeking ( $r = 0.29$ ).

**Table 3: Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among the Research Variables**

Variables	1	2	3	4
1- Sensation-seeking	1			
2- Gender role conflict	0.53*	1		
3- Sexual function	0.45*	0.40*	1	
4- Novelty-seeking	0.71*	0.65*	0.29*	1

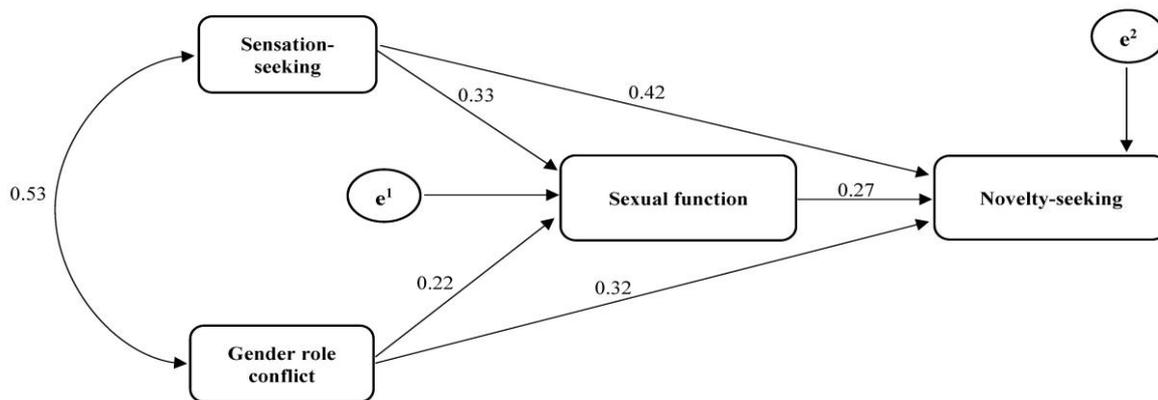
\*:  $p < 0.05$

Based on the results of the present study, the model presented in Figure 1 had adequate fitness, and all the direct paths were significant (Table 4). The fitness of the model was thus confirmed without needing adjustments. Fit indices, including the chi-squared index ( $\chi^2 = 1.33$ ), relative chi-squared index ( $\chi^2/df = 1.33$ ), goodness-of-fit index (GFI = 0.996), adjusted

goodness-of-fit index (AGFI = 0.99), comparative fit index (CFI = 0.99), incremental fit index (IFI = 0.99), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI = 0.98), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = 0.01) suggested the proper fit of the model. Figure 2 depicts the model of the study and the path coefficients.

**Table 4: Path Coefficients of Direct effects Between Research Variables in the Model.**

Path	$\beta$	Critical ratio	p
Sensation-seeking to sexual function	0.33	5.23	0.001
Gender role conflict to sexual function	0.22	3.47	0.001
Sensation-seeking to novelty-seeking	0.42	9.46	0.001
Gender role conflict to novelty-seeking	0.32	7.34	0.001
Sexual function to novelty-seeking	0.27	6.35	0.001



**Figure 2: The Final model Pertaining to the Mediating Role of Sexual Function in the Relationship of Sensation-Seeking and Gender role Conflict with Novelty-Seeking**

The bootstrapping technique was employed to examine the mediating relationships among the variables. Table 5 presents the results of the indirect paths. The indirect path from sensation-

seeking to novelty-seeking through sexual function ( $P= 0.004$ ), and the indirect path from gender role conflict to novelty-seeking through sexual function ( $P= 0.012$ ) were significant.

**Table 5: Results of the Bootstrap Method for Investigating Indirect and Intermediary Paths**

Predictor variable	Mediator Variable	Criterion variable	Coefficient	$\beta$	Lower limit	Upper limit	Total effect	t	p
Sensation-seeking	Sexual function	Novelty-seeking	0.26	0.09	0.06	0.13	0.41	3.69	0.004
Gender role conflict	Sexual function	Novelty-seeking	0.02	0.06	0.03	0.09	0.33	2.43	0.012

## Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship of sensation-seeking and gender role conflict with novelty-seeking through the mediation of sexual function in married men. The findings revealed a significant relationship between sensation-seeking and sexual function, and between sensation and novelty-seeking in men. There was also a causal relationship between sensation-seeking and novelty-seeking mediated by sexual function in men. This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies [29]. Sensation-seeking is a hereditary tendency to eagerly engage in an activity in response to new stimuli. People with a high level of sensation-seeking are often novelty-seeking, impatient, impulsive for reward, unable to accept failure, and disorganized. Sensation seekers constantly look for novel stimuli in their environment and are willing to achieve them at

the expense of risking their social credibility, honor, physical health, and even life [30]. The spouses' sexual function is a major factor influencing their marital satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction is a key factor in people's evaluation of their overall quality of life, and the quality and continuity of marital relations in particular. This factor is closely tied to constructs relevant to the quality of marital relations, e.g., the couples' relationship and sexual satisfaction [31]. Sexual satisfaction is also related to sexual desires and marks the last stage of the sex response cycle, and this explains the significant relationship between sensation-seeking and sexual function in men [32].

Another trait examined here was novelty-seeking, formed in response to psychological needs and emerging in any context, including one's job, sex, choice of clothing, etc. [33]. Research shows that men seek novelty more than women do and

demonstrate a greater tendency to having numerous sexual partners [34]. Men's unsatisfied sexual emotions are implicated as the main cause of this inclination. Other effective factors include the inability to resolve marital conflicts, curiosity for discovering the unknown, unmet psychological needs, desire for experiencing sex with different partners, and sexual deviations [35]. This justifies the significant relationship between sensation-seeking and novelty-seeking in men [35].

The couple's degree of sensation-seeking is a personality trait that can influence their marital relations [12]. In fact, sensation-seeking as an emotion-related personality trait is significant in marital relations, with tangible and undeniable impacts on married couples' emotional relationship [35]. Stress, emotional disorder, or lack of awareness of sexual function and physiology can all impact sexual activity [36]. According to the results of the present study, there was a causal relationship between sensation-seeking and novelty-seeking mediated by sexual function in men.

The findings also revealed a significant relationship between gender role conflict and sexual function as well as novelty-seeking, and a significant relationship between gender role conflict and novelty-seeking mediated by sexual function in men. This finding is consistent with the results of Faulkner et al. [37]. One of the roles acquired within the family is the gender role, defined as the society's expectations of activities and behaviors appropriate/inappropriate for men and women. Thus, in addition to distinct household/social responsibilities and tasks assigned to each gender, gender roles expected different personality and behavioral traits of men and women (e.g., emotional and tolerant behavior in women, and aggressive and calculating behavior in men) [15]. Although both men and women experience gender role conflict, men are shown to be more vulnerable to it [38]. The consequences of male gender role conflict are not limited to men, but go on to impact other people, especially their spouses who experience less marital harmony and satisfaction [27]. These men cannot express their emotions and establish intimate relationships, and this reduces their spouses' marital satisfaction. Due to their incessant effort to succeed, they spend no time

with their spouses and family and cannot strike a balance between their work and family life [39]. Consequently, men's gender role conflict is significantly related to their sexual function [40]. When they marry, men are faced with new and contradictory messages and expectations. Instead of being competitive and aggressive, they are expected to express their emotions and be intimate with their spouse, traits and behaviors that they used to disregard or did not learn at all before marriage [15]. Men need interpersonal and emotional skills at home as husbands and fathers and at the workplace as employees, colleagues, and managers, but these skills are not taught in the process of socialization [41]. Recent studies indicate that the spouses of men with gender role conflict experience less marital satisfaction and more depression and anxiety. Gender role conflict in men is, therefore, riddled with intra- and interpersonal consequences that disrupt the family's function [18]. It can thus be concluded that men's gender role conflict is significantly related to their novelty-seeking.

Men try to conform to the expected gender roles while disregarding their possible negative outcomes. Based on the gender role conflict model, roles that restrict the process of socialization have negative consequences for women and men [17]. Male gender role conflict leads to negative intra- and interpersonal consequences, including increased conflicts within the family, difficulty with intimacy, and more aggressive attitudes and behaviors against women [16]. Therefore, a causal relationship can be established between gender role conflict and novelty-seeking mediated by sexual function in men.

Sexual function was also found to significantly correlate with novelty-seeking in men. Sexual function is a combination of concepts, feedback, experiences, activities, feelings, and thoughts. Two groups of etiological factors are posited for sexual dysfunction: factors related to personality traits (e.g., psychopathology, exhaustion, lack of sexual knowledge, incorrect attitudes and beliefs about sex) and contextual and environmental factors (e.g., life events, physical and mental trauma, the spouse's response to sexual dysfunction, and the overall quality of sexual relationship) [8]. As a major dimension of the quality of married life and an actual

psychophysiological experience, sexual function significantly affects men's novelty-seeking [10]. Based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5), sexual function is characterized by a four-stage response cycle (excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution). Therefore, sexual function is significantly correlated with novelty-seeking in men.

The statistical population in this study comprised all the married men in Bushehr visiting marital counseling centers. As the results may have been limited by the demographic characteristics of this city, the results should be generalized to other populations with caution. Moreover, some confounding variables such as socioeconomic status and family background could have affected the results. To ensure the accuracy of the findings, it is recommended that this study be replicated on other populations and samples to provide more experimental background for future research. As novelty-seeking in men leads to marital problems, it is suggested that future studies examine the role of other variables on novelty-seeking.

The results of this study also can help community health nurses to present their care measures more effectively when facing individuals or families with similar problems, considering the importance of couples' sexual performance.

### Conclusion

Sensation-seeking and male gender role conflict can predict novelty-seeking. The results showed the effects of sensation-seeking and gender role conflict on novelty-seeking of married men, with the mediating role of sexual function. This study can pave the way for more studies to promote the stability of married life. Seminar and training courses should be administered to raise people's awareness of how to limit sexual novelty-seeking and thus prevent marital problems.

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### Conflict of interest

There was no conflict of interest to be declared.

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