



Review Article

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The History and Further Development of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale

Walter R Schumm*, and Stephan R Bollman

Department of Applied Human Sciences, Kansas State University, USA

*Corresponding author: Walter R Schumm, Emeritus professor of Applied Family Science, Kansas State University, USA.

To Cite This article: Walter R Schumm*, and Stephan R Bollman, The History and Further Development of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale. *Am J Biomed Sci & Res.* 2026 31(3) *AJBSR.MS.ID.004036*, DOI: [10.34297/AJBSR.2026.31.004036](https://doi.org/10.34297/AJBSR.2026.31.004036)

Received: 📅 May 23, 2026; Published: 📅 June 04, 2026

Abstract

A recent review attributed the development of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale to scholars Rusbult and Morrow; however, that scale was developed nearly 50 years ago in 1977 by Schumm, Bollman, and Jurich. The history and further development of the KMSS are discussed with reference to the use of the scale and evidence for its reliability and validity across different populations and nations.

Keywords: Marital satisfaction, Kansas marital satisfaction scale, KMSS, Social desirability, Marital adjustment, Marital happiness, Reliability, Validity, Measurement

Background

As noted by *Spanier* [1], "The quality and stability of marital relationships have received much attention in modern social science. Marital quality, adjustment, success, stability, and satisfaction are the most frequently studied aspects of marriage and family relationships today (p. 288), a situation echoed by *Spanier and Lewis* [2]. More recently, *Delatorre and Wagner* [3] argue that such concerns remain important and justified in terms of how much the quality of relationships can impact personal health and well-being.

Introduction

In 2023, Akanksha, Pudeskar, and Deshmukh [4:1] published an entry on the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) in which they attributed the development of the KMSS to psychologists Caryl Rusbult and John Morrow. They said that Rusbult and Morrow "eventually developed a three-item scale that they believed was the most effective at measuring overall marital satisfaction. The three items were as follows:

- a) In general, how satisfied are you with your marriage?
- b) Compared to most marriages, how would you describe your marriage?
- c) How often do you think things are going well in your marriage?" [4:2]

Nevertheless, they went on to accurately describe the response categories of the actual KMSS and that the total score is obtained by adding the scores of the three items, with higher scores representing greater marital satisfaction.

In more detail, they stated that "With a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95, the KMSS has been found to have good reliability and validity and

has been used in numerous studies to measure marital satisfaction in various populations [which they later cite as Chinese, Spanish, Turkish, Malaysian, Korean, India, and African American]. However, it should be noted that the scale is self-reported and subject to response and social desirability biases" [4: 2]. They went on to state that "the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale has become one of psychology's most commonly used marital satisfaction measures." [4: 2], concluding that "The KMSS is a self-report questionnaire that is widely used to assess marital relationship satisfaction around the globe." [4: 2]. In terms of construct validity, they said that "Communication, constructive resolution strategies, emotional expressiveness, sexual satisfaction, and marital length have all been identified as important variables in marital satisfaction research works utilizing the KMSS." [4: 2]. Furthermore, they added that "When compared to other scales, the KMSS is a short scale with only three elements. Although the KMSS assesses marital happiness in general, it does not look into specific aspects of relationships such as communication or dispute resolution. The KMSS, on the other hand, has been found to have high reliability and validity and is widely used in marital satisfaction research." [4: 4]. In terms of application, they concluded that "It is beneficial to both researchers and clinicians working in marital and family counseling. The results

of KMSS-based research studies can help couples and therapists understand the factors that contribute to a satisfying and fulfilling marital relationship, as well as guide the creation of interventions and treatments to improve marital happiness." [4: 4].

There are several problems with their entry [4]. First Morrow's name was not John Morrow, but was Gregory D. Morrow, now an emeritus professor of psychology from Penn West University, Edinboro, Pennsylvania. Second, Rusbult and Morrow did not invent the KMSS, even though they may have invented a scale with the three items they listed. The actual KMSS does include three items: "How satisfied are you with.... Your marriage, your relationship with your husband/wife/spouse, and your spouse as a partner?" Third, no references to Rusbult or Morrow's research were cited [4] to support their scale's development. Fourth, *Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew* [5] did use marital satisfaction level as a factor predicting commitment level directly and probability of persistence indirectly in their "investment model of commitment processes" [5: 360], using social exchange theory as the basis for this research, in contrast to our reliance upon symbolic interaction research and use of marital satisfaction as a dependent variable. Fifth, our search of the works of Rusbult or Morrow found several sets of items used to measure marital or relationship satisfaction, sets whose items changed over time rather than being only the three items mentioned [4].

1980: four items pertained to "respondents" attraction to their relationships, positivity of feelings for their partners, satisfaction with their relationships, and closeness of their relationships to their ideals" [6: 182];

1983: "How much do you like your partner? To what extent are you attracted to your partner? To what degree are you satisfied with your relationship?" [7: 107]; 1986a: At present, to what extent are you attracted to your partner, at present how does your relationship compare to most peoples', and at present, how satisfied are you with your relationship? [8: 53] 1986b: In general, to what extent are you attracted to your partner? In general, how does your relationship compare to other people's? All things considered, how satisfied are you with your relationship? [9: 84] 1998: I feel satisfied with our relationship, my relationship is much better than others' relationships, my relationship is close to ideal, our relationship makes me very happy, our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my need for intimacy, and I love my partner [5: 366] [6-9].

History of the KMSS

The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale was created for use in research in 1977 [10], based on Spanier and Coles [11] discussion of three different aspects of marital satisfaction. Numerous articles followed, on research by Schumm and his colleagues [12-46]. A copy of the original scale is available in [42: 387]. The scale was revised by Kurdek [47] to use nine response levels.

Recent Developments

The KMSS has been cited in several meta-analyses [48-54] and other reviews of the literature [55-66]. Not all reviews of the

marital adjustment literature mention the KMSS, however [67,68]. White, Stahmann, and Furrow [69] compared the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test with the KMSS in great detail. Graham, Diebels, and Barnow [70] cited the KMSS for its high levels of internal consistency reliability. Kurdek [71,72] used the KMSS with both heterosexual and gay/lesbian couples; at one point, Kurdek emailed me a correlation matrix revealing test-retest reliabilities for the KMSS over several years, but he forbade me from publishing that material; however, my recollection is that the correlations were adequate (.50 to .70). *Sabatelli* [64], reviewed numerous measures, but noted with respect to the KMSS that "The theoretical foundation of the measure is based on Spanier and Cole's (1976) [11] conceptual distinction between satisfaction with spouse, marriage, and the marriage relationship" [64: 900-901] and concluded that "The scale is direct, focuses on the relationship as a whole, and, at this time, has considerable support for its validity." [64: 901]. *Kurdek* [73] cited the KMSS as "a relatively pure measure of marital satisfaction" that correlated with the satisfaction scale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale in his study at $r = .82$ for husbands and $.84$ for wives" (both $p < .001$) [73: 199]. *Crane, Middleton, and Bean* [74] determined that the cutoff score for distressed/nondistressed couples for the KMSS was a score of 17 or above. *Sorokowski, et al.*, [75] used the KMSS in 33 countries and found that it was "reliable and culturally equivalent" [75: 4], with Cronbach alphas from .76 (Bulgaria) to .99 (Germany). *Kim, et al.*, [76] reported that the KMSS had been cited 1, 149 times in their search, which put it fifth among measures of global sentiment out of 30 scales evaluated, although Kim et al. incorrectly listed it as having only one item [76: 9].

Limitations

Analyses of individual articles [77-81] that assessed the reliability and validity of the KMSS, especially when used in conjunction with other measurements of marital quality, are beyond the scope of this report. Issues regarding marital social desirability [82-84] are also beyond the scope as well, though we recommend a recent report by *Kim, et al.* [85] that has discussed a variety of ways for controlling for possible effects of social desirability.

Conclusion

One benefit of living longer is a greater opportunity to see your own research attributed to others. The KMSS was developed in 1977 [10] from issues discussed by *Spanier and Cole* [11] rather than by *Rusbult and Morrow* [5-9]. Since then, a great deal of research has explored the reliability and validity of the KMSS. While the KMSS and many other measures of marital adjustment, happiness, satisfaction, or quality have demonstrated varying levels of reliability and validity, we are continuing to learn more about marital outcomes with more sophisticated levels of measurement and analyses, which may challenge our conventional wisdoms, even leave us at a crossroads in the field, but hopefully lead to better scientific understanding [59, 86]. A recent analysis of numerous scale items found a common factor underlying all of them, which may mean that there is so much common variance among different

scales that predicting one from another may resemble predicting something from itself [76]. Future research concerning marital quality will need to take these new developments into account.

Permission for Scale Use for Academic, Non-profit Purposes

The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, the Kansas Parental Satisfaction Scale, and the Kansas Family Life Satisfaction Scale may be used at no cost for non-profit academic research as you wish; you may translate the scales as needed at no cost. As a courtesy, please advise Dr. Schumm at schumm@ksu.edu about the results of your research with these scales, especially if/when your research is published.

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the role of Professor Anthony P. Jurich (1947-2010) in the development of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale between 1976 and 2010.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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