



Original Article

Couple relationship experiences: A gender-based approach

Priyanka Samuel¹, Krishna Kumar Mishra²

¹Assistant Professor, School of Behavioural Forensics, National Forensic Sciences University, Delhi Campus, New Delhi, India

²Associate Professor, School of Behavioural Forensics, National Forensic Sciences University, Gandhinagar Campus, Gujarat, India

Date of Submission:

25 October 2023

Date of Acceptance:

05 November 2023

Abstract

Couple relationships are important in an individual's life since strong emotions are associated with involvement in such a relationship. A dyadic connection differs from a relationship with friends and acquaintances, as couples share a very close and delicate union. Though the positive association between life satisfaction and marriage is well-established in the available literature, other research studies also indicated a difference in reporting among the couples in terms of satisfaction in marriage, which is a prominent indicator of happiness in marriage. The study intended to examine the experience of couple relationships in males and females. For this purpose, fifty couples aged 25 to 45 years married for more than two years were taken in the study. The study was a non-experimental, cross-sectional study. The sample was selected using a random sampling technique. A significant difference was observed in males and females in their experience of marital relationships in terms of marital satisfaction, dyadic adjustment, and marital conflict. The study has clinical implications in understanding couple dynamics and factors affecting a marital relationship.

Keywords:

Marital Satisfaction, Marital conflict, Dyadic relationship, Marital adjustment, Couple experiences

Corresponding author: Dr. Priyanka Samuel

Email: priyanka.samuel@nfsu.ac.in

How to cite the article: Samuel, P., Mishra, K. K.

(2023). Couple relationship experiences: A gender-based approach. *Indian Journal of Health, Sexuality and Culture*, 9(2), 68–76.

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10434383

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 License which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

Introduction

Couple relationships endure notable importance in an individual's life since strong emotions are associated with involvement in such a relationship. A dyadic connection differs from a relationship with friends and acquaintances, as couples share a very close and delicate union. It is opined that marriage has a strong positive association with life satisfaction^[1,2,3,4] and the variation in findings

has been evident in research conducted time to time.^[5,6]

Several factors determine satisfaction in marriage among both males and females. Satisfaction is subjective in nature, and it varies from individual to individual.^[7,8] In patriarchal societies, there is unequal control of finances and decision-making; interpersonal conflict is reported higher, and even sexual behavior is perceived differently for men and women.^[9,10] Sexual satisfaction is a critical factor in establishing marital satisfaction.^[11] Women are believed to endure a submissive role in their sexual expression, and their sexual needs are supposed to be suppressed in many cultures.^[11]

Earlier researches suggest women suffering from a persistent power struggle are more likely to have low satisfaction in marriage and will experience low happiness in the relationship^[12,13,14], which indicates that women tend to experience less satisfaction than men in a married relationship. Other studies concluded that men benefit more than women from marriage. The most common factor that supports a more significant benefit for men is an unequal distribution of work in terms of household and childcare in the families.^[15,16,17,18]

However, there is a significant change in the modern era where women are associated with shouldering the financial load of men. However, in India, families regard household and childcare responsibilities as women and men for financial obligations.^[19,20,21] Stevens, Kiger, and Mann on (2005) found that the unequal distribution of work between couples and the resistance of husbands from bringing equality in the role distribution leads to lower relationship satisfaction in marriage.^[22] Amato et al. (2007) reported that socioeconomic status and education have an important role in accepting the shift in power distribution in males and females and couples.^[23]

As per the findings of different research, women are more likely to approach and

commence marital therapy. And women are found to be favouring and begin divorce proceedings during or after treatment.^[24,25,26,27] This indicates more dissatisfaction and built-up frustration in women. Chipper field and Havens (2001) mentioned in their research the decrease in marital satisfaction in women with the change of marital status and going through different levels of marriage.^[28]

Method

The focus of the present study was to explore the association of the factors that determine a couple's satisfaction in marriage. It is significant to have an in-depth understanding of the possible factors associated with decreased marital satisfaction in males and females. Also, cultural factors need to be considered because cultural beliefs are related to expectations from a marriage, which can further play a role in the experience of happiness and satisfaction in marriage.^[11] Experience and consideration of happiness in a relationship are related to the appraisal of joy is associated with the "comparison of one's circumstances and the environment with what is thought to be a suitable standard".^[7] It is essential to remember the personal, social and environmental aspects to understand the construct associated with a marital relationship.

Participants

The study was non-experimental and cross-sectional in nature. Fifty married couples aged 25 to 45 years; married for more than two years were taken in the study. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique. Married couples from the community or hospital /counselling centre referred for couple's therapy were chosen. They have minimum educational qualification of 10th standard or more. Couples diagnosed with severe psychiatric illness, epilepsy, and mental retardation or a history of general medical and neurological conditions or substance abuse in one or both partners or couples with a history of domestic violence were excluded.

Tools

After reviewing the literature and the suitability of appropriate measures to be used in the present study, the following measures were finalized to include in the present study: Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RADs), Couple Satisfaction Inventory, KANSAS Marital Conflict Scale (KMCS). These measures are regularly used throughout the studies and provide robust psychometric values. Along with this, demographic details of participants were also recorded.

1. **Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RADs):** It is a 14-item scale to assess relationship satisfaction. The RDAS is a revised version of the original Dyadic Adjustment Scale.^[29] The RDAS has the same hierarchical structure as the DAS. [30]The revised version offers better psychometric properties, is shorter, and includes 3 of the original four sub scales: (1) Dyadic Consensus - the level of the agreeableness of the spouse with the partner. (2) Dyadic Satisfaction -- /marital/ relationship satisfaction with the partner (3) Dyadic Cohesion -the degree to which individual and partner participate in conjoint activities. The authors demonstrated the RD AS to have an adequate model fit and an instrument's internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .90.
2. **Couple Satisfaction Inventory[31]:** It is a 32-item scale to assess an individual's satisfaction in a relationship. The scale has three different versions of scale (32-item versions, 16-item versions and 4-item versions) to be used as per the researcher's need. As per the literature, CSI-32 is a reliable and valid tool.^[31] Participants are asked to rate different facets of their relationship on a Likertscale. The range of the score is from 0 to 161. Higher scores indicate higher relationship satisfaction.

The CSI-32 was found to have a strong reliability of $\alpha = 0.97$.

3. **KANSAS Marital Conflict Scale (KMCS):** KMCS was developed by Eggerman, Moxley, and Schumm in 1985.^[32] The KMCS is a series of three scales designed to measure the stages of marital conflict. The first stage has 11 items, the second stage has five things, and 3rd stage has 11 items for a total of 27 items. The scale helps evaluate marital therapy, mainly since it measures patterns in marital conflict over distinct stages. KCMS has excellent internal consistency, with alphas for all locations for men in the range of .91 to .95 and alphas for women ranging from .88 to .95. Stability of the measure also is perfect, with six months test-retest correlations of the three stages that range from .64 to .96.

Procedure

The study was conducted after the approval by the appropriate Institutional Ethical Board. Couples were selected as per the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. They were told about the research, and informed consent was obtained before the responses were recorded. They were familiarized with the study tools, and instructions were given to complete the questionnaires. The scoring and statistical analyses were then carried out using SPSS 20.0.

Results

The study was correlational in nature. The current study used Pearson's correlation method to explore the association between variables. Independent sample t-test was used to examine the difference in mean scores reported by couples on different measures used in the study. Initially, the Kolmogorov

Smirnov Z test was performed to determine the normalcy of data. It was found that the data on some domains was not normally distributed but within the range recommended for parametric analysis techniques.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Age	32	4.21	24	40
Education	18	.99	18	20
Duration of marriage in years	Frequency	Percent		
5	12	20.7		
6	14	24.1		
7	16	27.6		
8	4	6.9		
10	4	6.9		
Socio-economic Status				
Middle	22	37.9		
Upper	6	10.3		
Lower Middle	10	17.2		
Upper Middle	12	20.7		

The characteristics of the participants are given in Table1. The mean age was 32 years, and the Standard Deviation (SD) was 4.21. The minimum age was 24 years, and the maximum was 40 years. The mean years of Education was 18 and SD was 0.99. The minimum number of years of education was

18, and the Maximum was 20. Twelve participants were married for 5 years, fourteen were married for 6 years, sixteen for 7 years, and four participants were married for 8 years and four for 10 years.22 participants were from middle socio-economic status(SES), 6 from upper SES, 10 from lower middle SES, and 12 from upper middle SES.

Table 2: Correlation values for dyadic adjustment, couple’s satisfaction, and marital conflict

	1	2	3	4	5
1. DAS-Consensus					
2. DAS-Satisfaction	.458**				
3. DAS-Cohesion	.402**	.510**			
4. DAS-Total	.808**	.781**	.782**		
5. Couples Satisfaction Inventory	.389**	.201	.566**	.479**	
6. KANSAS Marital Conflict Scale	.357*	.538**	.735**	.648**	.682*

*P <0.05, ** P < 0.01, *** P< 0.0001

Table 2 presents the outcome of statistical analysis to see the correlation between couple's satisfaction, dyadic adjustment, and

couple’s satisfaction. A significant positive correlation was found between Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) subdomains

Consensus and satisfaction $r=.458$, $p< 0.01$, Cohesion and Consensus $r=.402$ $p<0.01$, Cohesion and satisfaction $r= .501$ $p< 0.01$. The total score of DAS correlated positively with the couple’s satisfaction $r= .479$ $p<0.01$. A significant positive correlation was also found between Couple’s Satisfaction Inventory (CSI) and Consensus $r=.389$ $p<0.01$, CSI correlated positively with cohesion $r= .566$ $p<0.05$. On the Kansas

Marital Conflict Inventory (KMCS), a positive significant correlation was seen of KMCS with Cohesion $r= .357$ $P<0.05$. Satisfaction correlated positively with KMCS $r=.538$ $p<0.01$ and cohesion also positively associated with KMCS $r= .735$ $p<0.01$. The dyadic Adjustment Scale showed a positive association with KMCS $r=.648$ $p<0.01$ and Couple’s Satisfaction Inventory also associated positively with KMCS $r=.682$ $p<0.05$.

Table 3: Gender difference in dyadic adjustment, couple's satisfaction, and marital conflict

Domains	Gender	Mean	t	df	Sig.
Dyadic Adjustment Scale	Female	34.55	-3.339	148	.001
	Male	38.24			.001
DAS-Consensus	Female	12.84	-2.796	148	.006
	Male	14.63			.006
DAS-Satisfaction	Female	11.37	-2.960	148	.004
	Male	12.68			.004
DAS-Cohesion	Female	10.60	-3.102	148	.002
	Male	12.03			.002
Couple’s Satisfaction Inventory	Female	78.64	-2.089	148	.038
	Male	87.56			146.886
KANSAS Marital Conflict Scale	Female	93.13	-.894	148	.373
	Male	97.21			146.829

Table 3 depicts the gender difference of participants on the study variables. A statistically significant difference was found in reporting on subdomains (Consensus M =, Satisfaction, and Cohesion), total Dyadic Adjustment Scale scores, and couple's satisfaction inventory but no difference was found for the KANSAS Marital Conflict

Scale. T values are negative, indicating that group II (Females) have a higher mean value than group I (Males).

Discussion

The focus of the present study was to explore the association of the factors that determine a couple’s satisfaction in marriage. Marital

satisfaction is crucial in a concordant relationship in a couple. However, the experience of happiness and satisfaction can be relative and subjective and explained as per the cultural factors of society.^[9,10] A difference is observed in males' and females' experience of marital relationships as per the results of the present study. This difference may be due to subjective experiences of marital relationships in couples significantly impacting the relationship quality. We attempted to investigate the areas in which the differences in couples can be established and the contributing factors for the same.

A positive correlation was observed between consensus and satisfaction and consensus and cohesion. Dyadic consensus is the level of agreeableness with the partner, which is also a strong indicator of the togetherness of the couple. Couples who have a consensus on most subjects or are similar-minded are found to be more satisfied, as per the results of the present study. Bahr(1983) found that role consensus strongly correlates with dyadic satisfaction in the relationship.^[33] Cohesion, on the other hand, is the participation of a couple in combined activities.^[29,34]

Cohesion and consensus showed a positive significant correlation. There was a positive correlation of dyadic cohesion with dyadic satisfaction, which means conjoint activities increase marital satisfaction in married couples. Overall scores of the dyadic adjustment scale correlated positively with the couple's satisfaction. The more adjustment in couples increases marital satisfaction. However, the term satisfaction is subjective in nature. In a couple relationship, more profound aspects of the relationship need to be explored to derive a better picture of the functioning of a dyadic relationship. Because a superficial understanding of relationships can lead to dysfunction and frustration in the relationship.^[6]

Couple satisfaction Index was found to be

positively correlated with consensus and cohesion. Dyadic agreeableness and conjoint activities in couples increase a couple's satisfaction and vice versa. The couple's conflict positively correlated with dyadic consensus, cohesion, satisfaction, and total dyadic adjustment. However, it doesn't infer a literal positive association of the variables because of the Couple's Conflict Scale scoring scheme. As per the scoring, high scores on the scale indicate low conflict in couples. Hence, the results reflect a negative and inverse association between couple conflict and dyadic consensus, dyadic cohesion, dyadic satisfaction, and total dyadic adjustment.

The dyadic adjustment seems to be a broad understanding of the vital aspects of marriage, like marital satisfaction and marital happiness, which can determine the quality of marriage.^[35] It determines the adaptation of married partners in the relationship with one other more consistently.^[36] Although, it is not necessary that couples who report being well-adjusted are satisfied in marriage.^[37] Interpersonal conflict is "an interaction between persons expressing opposing interests, views, or opinions. "Expression of interests, views, and opinions can be caused by partners holding incompatible goals."^[38,39] We understand from the above-mentioned definitions that marital conflict is directly associated with the quality of a couple's relationship, relationship satisfaction, and marital adjustment. Marital conflict further plays a crucial role in determining the success of a marriage. The findings of our study align with the earlier research that significant differences found in males and females in terms of marital satisfaction.^[33,40,41] Connides (2001) found that females experience lower satisfaction in marriage than men.^[42] Tasew, Getahun and Prete (2021) explained in their research how marital conflict couple relationships and marital adjustment.^[43]

Although the present study attempted to explore the inconclusive understanding on

reporting of couples on indicators of happiness in couple relationship, the following limitation needs to be addressed in future research. The present study has comparatively small sample size, so the result can't be generalized. For elaborate understanding, the homogeneous sample can be included. The span of marriage years could be increased to understand couple relationship with progressive age. Factors like, the number of children and financial status could have also been explored.

Conclusion

As per the current study, there is a significant gender difference in the experience of couple relationships. Females were found to be less satisfied than males. A significant difference was also observed in different domains of adjustment and conflict. Females were found to experience more conflict and low adjustment. However, overall, both males and females experienced significant levels of couple conflict, adjustment difficulty, and low satisfaction in marriage. Familial, social obligations and a sense of financial insecurity in females may be the contributing factor to increased values in females. One of the possible reasons for marital discord is worries about the financial condition and livelihood of females. Low sexual satisfaction in females may also be associated with low marital satisfaction, and gratification of the same receives rare attention. The findings can be viewed in terms of understanding the dynamics that lead to failure or success in marriage. Future research efforts can be directed towards understanding these factors from a wider population and cross-cultural perspective.

Acknowledgment: None

Conflict of interest: None

References

1. Hong L. K., Duff R. W., (1997). The relative importance of spouses, children, and friends in the life satisfaction of retirement community residents. *Journal of Clinical Geropsychology*,3(4), 275-282.
2. Kehn, D. J. (1995). Predictors of elderly happiness. *Activities, Adaptation, and Aging*, 19(3), 11-30.
3. Lubben J. E. (1989). Gender differences in the relationship of widowhood and psychological well-being among low-income elderly. Grau L., (ed.) *Women in the later years: Health, social, and cultural perspectives*. Harrington Park Press, New York. 161-189.
4. Stroebe M. S., Stroebe W. (1983). Who suffers more? Gender differences in health risks of the widowed. *Psychological Bulletin*, 93, 279-301.
5. Whiteman, S. D., McHale, S. M., & Crouter, A. C. (2007). Longitudinal changes in marital relationships: The role of offspring's pubertal development. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69, 1005-1020. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00427.x
6. Kamp Dush, C. M., Taylor, M. G., & Kroeger, R. A. (2008). Marital Happiness and Psychological Well-Being Across the Life Course. *Family Relations*, 57(2), 211-226.
7. Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction with Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49(1), 71-75.
8. Warr, P. (1990). The measurement of well-being and other aspects of mental health. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 63, 193-210.
9. Finlay, SJ & Clarke, V. (2003). A Marriage of Inconvenience? Feminist Perspectives on Marriage. *Feminist & Psychology*, 13, 415-420.
10. Thompson, L. and Walker, A. (1995) The Place of Feminism in Family Studies. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 847-866.

11. Heiman, J.R., Long, J.S., Smith, S.N. et al. (2011). Sexual Satisfaction and Relationship Happiness in Midlife and Older Couples in Five Countries. *Archive of Sexual Behavior*, 40, 741-753.

12. Ball, F. L. J., Cowan, P., & Cowan, C. P. (1995). Who's got the power? Gender differences in partners' perceptions of influence during marital problem-solving discussions. *Family Process*, 34, 303-321.

13. Brezsnyak, M. & Whisman, M. A. (2004). Sexual Desire and Relationship Functioning: The Effects of Marital Satisfaction and Power. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 30(3), 199-217.

14. Gray-Little, B., Baucom, D. H., & Hamby, S. L. (1996). Marital power, marital adjustment, and therapy outcome. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 10, 292-303.

15. Ferree, M. M. (2010). Filling the glass: Gender perspectives on families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 420-439.

16. Osmond, M. W., & Thorne, B. (1993). Feminist theories: The social construction of gender in families and society. In P. Boss, W. J. Doherty, R. LaRossa, W. R. Schumm, & S. K. Steinmetz (Eds.), *Sourcebook of family theories and methods: A contextual approach* (pp. 591-625). New York: Plenum Press.

17. Waite, L. J. (1995). Does marriage matter? *Demography*, 32, 483-507. doi:10.2307/2061670

18. Williams, K., & Umberson, D. (2004). Marital status, marital transitions, and health: A gendered life course approach. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 45, 81-98.

19. Sayer, L. C. (2005). Gender, time, and inequality: Trends in women's and men's paid work, unpaid work, and free time. *Social Forces*, 84, 285-303.

20. Dempsey, K. C. (2000). Men and women's power relationships and the persisting inequitable division of housework. *Journal of Family Studies*, 6, 7-24.

21. Grote, N. K., & Clark, M. S. (2001). Perceiving unfairness in the family: Cause or consequence of marital distress? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 281-293.

22. Stevens, D. P., Kiger, G., & Mannon, S. E. (2005). Domestic labor and marital satisfaction: How much or how satisfied? *Marriage & Family Review*, 37(4), 49-67.

23. Amato, P. R., Booth, A., Johnson, D. R., & Rogers, S. J. (2007). *Alone together: How marriage in America is changing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

24. Doss, B. D., Atkins, D. C., & Christensen, A. (2003). Who's dragging their feet? Husbands and wives seeking marital therapy. *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy*, 29, 165-177.

25. Miller, R. B., Yorgason, J. B., Sandberg, J. G., & White, M. B. (2003). Problems that couples bring to therapy: A view across the family life cycle. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 31, 395-407.

26. Montenegro, X. P. (2004). *The divorce experience: A study of divorce in midlife and beyond*. Washington, DC: AARP.

27. Rokach, R., Cohen, O., & Dreman, S. (2004). Who pulls the trigger? Who initiates divorce among over 45-year-olds? *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 42, 61-83.

28. Chipperfield, J. G., & Havens, B. (2001). Gender differences in the relationship between marital status transitions and life satisfaction in later life. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 56(3), P176-P186.

29. Spanier, G., Robert A. L., & Charles L. Cole (1975). "Marital adjustment over the family life cycle: The issue of curvilinearity. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 37, 263-275.

30. Busby, D. M., Christensen, C., Crane, D. R., & Larson, J. H. (1995). A revision of the dyadic adjustment scale for use with distressed and non-distressed couples:

- Construct hierarchy and multidimensional scales. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 21(3), 289-308.
31. Funk, J.L., & Rogge, R.D. (2007). Testing the Ruler with Item Response Theory: Increasing Precision of Measurement for Relationship Satisfaction with the Couples Satisfaction Index. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21, 572-583.
 32. Eggeman, K. W., Moxley, V., & Schumm, W. R. (1985). Assessing spouses' perceptions of Gottman's temporal form in marital conflict. *Psychology Reports*, 57(1), 171-181.
 33. Bahr, S. J., Chappell, C. B., & Leigh, G. K. (1983). Age at Marriage, Role Enactment, Role Consensus, and Marital Satisfaction. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 45(4), 795-803.
 34. Albrecht, S.L. (1979). Correlates of Marital Happiness among the Remarried. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 41(4), 857-867. <https://doi.org/10.2307/351485>
 35. Lewis R, Spanier G. (1979). Theorizing about the Quality and Stability of Marriage. In: Burr WR, Hill R, Nye FI, Reiss I, (2 ed.). *Contemporary Theories about the Family: Research-based theories*. New York: Free Press
 36. Isanezhad O, Ahmadi SA, Bahrami F, Baghban I, Farajzadegan Z, Etemadi O. (2013). Factor structure and reliability of the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) in Iranian population. *Iran Journal of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences*, 6, 55-61.
 37. Ghaffari M. (2016). Spiritual Well-Being and Dyadic Adjustment: Mediator Effects for Family Strengths. *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences*, 10(3), e1699. <https://doi.org/10.17795/ijpbs-1699>
 38. Lewin, K. (1948). *Resolving social conflicts; selected papers on group dynamics*. Oxford, England: Harper.
 39. Bradbury, T., Rogge, R., & Lawrence, E. (2001). Reconsidering the role of conflict in marriage. In A. Booth, A. C. Crouter, & M. Clements (Eds.), *Couples in conflict* (pp. 59-81). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
 40. Bernard, J. (1972). *The future of marriage*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
 41. Vessey, J. T., & Howard, K. I. (1993). Who seeks psychotherapy? *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 30, 546-553.
 42. Connides, I. A. (2001). *Family ties and aging*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
 43. Tasew , Getahun & Prete. (2021). Marital conflict among couples: The case of Durbete town, Amhara region, Ethiopia. *CogentPsychology*, 8(1), 1-17.