
Loneliness and Emotional Regulation among Un-Married Working Women

Zahra Ejaz¹, Naeema Sarfaraz², Ayesha Sarfaraz³**Abstract**

Loneliness is considered as a risk factor for various kinds of psychological and emotional outcomes, however, there is limited research in indigenous context exploring how it effects the mental health of unmarried women who have crossed the marriageable age. The present study investigated the relationship between loneliness and emotional regulation among un-married educated working women (25-55 years). Sample of un-married working women ($N = 150$) was taken from school ($N = 50$), college ($N = 50$) and university teachers ($N = 50$). University of California Loneliness Scale revised 20-items (Russell, 1996) and Emotional Regulation Questionnaire 10 items (Gross & John, 2003) were used. Data was statistically analyzed using Correlation, and One Way ANOVA analysis. Significant relationship was found between loneliness and emotional regulation in un -married working women. Results also concluded that different age ranges have no significant effect on un-married working women. It is also concluded that income affects the emotional regulation ability of working women. Finding of the research will help in understanding the strengths and struggles of working women who are single. The study sheds light on the so-called impression of the society that being single is a matter of great concern and it challenges the loneliness and emotional regulation level among woman but the results revealed that in educated women, single-hood is not a matter that determines loneliness and it does not affect the level of emotional regulation in professional un-married women.

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Introduction

Owing to the societal pressure concerning marriage in our culture, unmarried women and their parents feel immense pressure to get

their daughters married in their early twenties. Un-married women are highlighted in our societies and discussed upon by their close social circles. Permission from the parents and family pressure is considered as an important factor in taking decision about a women's marriage in Asian countries (Talukder et al., 2020). Women are not only expected to get married at an early age but since they are working so their independence is considered a threat by the society. It is observed that late marriages are more frequent among working class women as they are busy in their career and are less compromising. According to a recent survey, 23% of women having higher education are not getting married because of their high demands for their partners (Ortiz & Pillai, 2019). A lot of research has been done in western countries but in Pakistan, there is a

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lack of literature on this topic. To stay single for a longer period of time is very difficult for females in Pakistani culture because the society is conservative and a male support and presence in the life of a female is considered necessary. As a result, un-married women face a wide variety of problems including high pressure of not getting married, low social support which cause loneliness and less ability to regulate their emotions due to society's negative perception towards un-married women.

The present study is aimed at studying the relationship between loneliness and emotional regulation among un-married educated working women. This study also aims to measure, how income and employment status of unmarried working women effect their level of loneliness and emotional regulation. Moreover, the study also aims to inquire about the capacity of emotional regulation in women of different age groups (Khan & Mazhar, 2018).

Loneliness is a feeling of sadness including upset and isolated feelings. Loneliness can be an important factor of meeting both for emotional and social requirements for single men and women (Botteril et al., 2016). Loneliness usually occurs when one has no partner with whom they can share their feelings and emotions. However, loneliness not only occurs because of not having life partner but also when you do not have any support from family and friends (Stevens & Westerhof, 2006). However, people who stay single till later age may also become habitual of remaining alone and independent and may develop skills to handle and fulfil their social and emotional needs by themselves without support of others (Snell, 2017). Many researchers supported the phenomenon that loneliness is connected to the marriage, or grades in education and low rate of income and it also indicate that higher level of loneliness is linked to physical health issues, issues in socializing with others, and

emotional and psychological issues (Liebke et al., 2017). Loneliness is a type of outer factor that starts externally and then continue internally, which effects on the emotional state of human being. Women are emotionally more vulnerable to feel loneliness rather than males (Dykstra, 1995). Un-married old age women feel lonelier than married women. Un-married middle-age and older women also have negative relationships with their neighbors, children and other adults than the married women. Never married females shows more emotional difficulties as compared to married females (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001).

Emotional regulation can be defined as the process by which an individual consciously and unconsciously modulates emotions in order to respond to environmental demands (Bargh & Willians, 2007). Females are assumed to be more emotional than the males and females give more rapid reaction than the males (Marroquin et al., 2019). Less ability to regulate their emotions can cause a person to stay alone and avoid activities in which they may have to take decisions properly. Thus, loneliness and emotional regulation are interconnected, loneliness can contribute towards the development of emotional dysregulation and inability to manage one's emotions can lead one to be isolated socially. Therefore, the current research aims to look at the relationship between loneliness and emotional regulation among unmarried working women.

Method

Research Design

Quantitative correlational research design was employed.

Sample Size and Characteristics

The purposive sampling strategy was used to select the sample. The sample comprised of 150 working women with the age range of 25-55 years. The participants ($n=150$) were taken from schools ($n=50$), colleges ($n=50$),

and ($n=50$) universities where participants from different areas of Lahore i.e., Jail Road, Samnabad, Iqbal Town, Gulberg, Secretariat, Kechehry Road, Cantt and Defence Housing Authority, participated in the research. The frequency and percentages indicated that majority of participant's were Muslims, educated and belonged to middle class. Teachers with different income ranges and age-range were included in the sample.

Measures

Following questionnaires were used to collect data regarding loneliness and emotional regulation among working women after taking permission from the authors of the scale.

Demographic Information Sheet

It was constructed by the researcher to gather personal information from the participants. It measures the variables like age, education, salary range, socio-economic status, family type.

University of California Loneliness Scale

It is a self-report inventory consisting of 20 items. It has a 4 point likert scale ranging from (1) Never, (2) Rarely, (3) Sometimes and (4) Often. The measure has been shown to be a valid and reliable measure of loneliness $\alpha=.89-.94$ (Russell, 1996).

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

Emotional regulation questionnaire is a self-report measure. It is a 10-item scale designed

to measure respondent's tendency to regulate their emotions in 2 ways: (1) Cognitive Reappraisal and, (2) Expressive Suppression. There are 6 reappraisal items (1,3,5,7,8,10) and 4 suppression items (2,4,6,9) present in this scale. Respondents answer each item on a 7 point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability of the scale is $\alpha=.57$ (Gross & John, 2003).

Procedure

Permission was obtained from the institutes prior to data collection. Participants were approached at their respective workplaces and consent was obtained prior to conducting the research. University of California loneliness scale, Emotional regulation scale and demographic information sheet was used to collect the data. It took almost 15 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection and participants were informed that their data will be kept confidential and they had the right to withdraw at any point in time.

Results

The frequency and percentage indicated that the majority of the participants were Muslims, had post-graduate level of education and belonged to middle class family.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 150)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
25-35	126	84.0
36-45	18	12.0
46-55	6	4.0
Teaching Designation		
School Teacher	50	33.3
College Teacher	50	33.3
University Teacher	50	33.3
Education		

Intermediate	2	1.3
Graduation	21	14.0
Masters, BS honors	41	27.3
MPhil/MS	67	44.7
PhD	19	12.7
Income Ranges		
Below 20,000	34	22.7
20,000-30,000	25	16.7
30,000-40,000	24	16.0
40,000 and above	67	44.7
Socio Economic Status		
Upper middle class	23	15.3
Middle class	124	82.7
Lower middle class	2	1.3

Note. *f*=frequency; % = percentage

Table 1 shows demographic characteristics of the sample. There were 150 un-married working women with the age range of 25-55 in which 84% females were from 25-35 years old. There was equal representation of all professions, i.e., school teachers, college

teachers and university teachers. Table 1 indicated there was more frequency of females who had MS degree (44%) whereas Intermediate degree holder was reported less 1.3%.

Table 2

Reliability Coefficients of Loneliness and Emotional Regulation Scales (N=150)

<i>Scales</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>K</i>
Loneliness	.81	20
Emotional regulation	.67	10

Note: *α*= reliability coefficient, *k* = no. of items

Table 3.2 showed the reliability coefficients of the loneliness and emotional regulation scales. The results showed that all scales have good internal consistency. Loneliness scale

showed higher internal reliability (*k*=20, *α*=.81) and Emotional regulation scale also showed higher internal reliability (*k*=10, *α*=.67).

Table 3

Correlation Matrix of Emotional Regulation and Loneliness (N=150)

Measures	LON	ER	Supp	Cog
LON	-	-.41*	-.21**	.11
ER	-	-	.70**	.92**
Supp	-	-	-	.37**
Cog	-	-	-	-

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < .001$

Note: LON= Loneliness Scale, ER= Emotional Regulation, Supp= Expressive Suppression, Cog= Cognitive Reappraisal

The result indicated that the loneliness was significantly negatively correlated with emotional regulation ($r = -.41$, $p < .05$) and its

subscale of expressive suppression ($r = -.21$, $p < .001$).

Table 4

One Way Analysis of Variance between Age Ranges of Women and Loneliness, Emotional Regulation (N=150)

Variables	M	SD	F (149)	p
Loneliness			1.39*	.02
25-35	30.88	11.41		
36-45	41.88	6.80		
46-55	40.66	9.39		
Emotional Regulation			.01	.99
25-35	36.05	11.41		
36-45	36.00	11.98		
46-55	35.72	11.90		

* $p < .05$

The results indicated that emotional regulation was not affected by ages of unmarried working women ($F = .01$, $p < .99$). However, score on loneliness varied across different age groups ($F = 1.39$, $p < .05$). Post-

hoc analysis revealed that middle-aged (36-45) and older women (45-55) scored higher on loneliness as compared to younger women (25-35).

Table 5

One Way Analysis of Variance of Income Ranges of Women, Loneliness and Emotional Regulation, (N = 150)

Variables	M	SD	F (149)	p
Loneliness			.07	.52
Below 20,000	30.92	6.42		
20,000-30,000	29.31	7.12		
30,000-40,000	29.26	6.79		
40,000andabove	30.70	7.24		
Emotional Regulation			2.65*	.005
Below 20,000	33.79	8.92		
20,000-30,000	33.36	10.02		
30,000-40,000	32.62	9.98		
40,000andabove	38.70	13.87		

* $p < .01$

The results indicated that different salary ranges have significant impact on the level of emotional regulation ($F=2.65$, $p<.01$) of unmarried working women. Post-hoc analysis revealed that women who were financially

Discussion

The current study was carried out to explore the relationship between loneliness and emotional regulation among unmarried working women of Pakistan. The results of present study concluded that there is a significant negative correlation between loneliness and emotional regulation. Moreover, emotional regulation has two components; cognitive restructuring and expressive suppression, loneliness was found to be significantly negatively correlated with expressive suppression, however, the relationship between cognitive restructuring and loneliness was non-significant. These results are supported by existent literature (Nikmanesh et al., 2015; Veloti et al., 2021). This could be because individuals who are better able to regulate their emotions by suppressing expression of undesirable emotional outbursts are better able to handle social interactive situations. They are less likely to experience anger outbursts and social anxiety when questioned about their marital status in social gatherings, which is a norm in Pakistani culture as marriage is considered a big achievement for women, leading to develop healthy social relationships. Such individuals are more likely to receive social support from their near and dear ones reducing the chances of loneliness. On the contrary, those who score high on loneliness are less likely to make use of adaptive social regulation strategies resulting in social isolation, which might aggravate their feelings of loneliness (Veloti et al., 2021).

The current research also looked at differences in level of loneliness and emotional regulation among women

secure and earned above PKR 40, 000 per month had better emotional regulation. Whereas income had no effect on loneliness experienced by working women.

belonging to different age groups. Results of analysis of variance reveal that age has a significant impact on feelings of loneliness as middle and older age unmarried women experience higher levels of loneliness than younger unmarried women. This is because lack of a partner with whom one can share their every day stressors and happiness can take a toll on a person's mental health leading to feelings of loneliness. These results are in line with the research conducted by Pinquart and Sorensen (2001) who also report that older unmarried woman experience more loneliness compared to younger unmarried women. However, age did not seem to have an impact on one's level of emotional regulation. Phillips et al. (2008) also report non-significant differences in emotional regulation among different age groups.

It was also explored whether one's financial status, i.e., income has an impact on their level of loneliness and emotional regulation. Results of analysis of variance revealed that income has a significant impact on emotional regulation. These results are corroborated by previous literature as Evans and Rosenbaum (2008) also reported that people who earn less have lower levels of emotional regulation as compared to people who earn more. This could be because financial constraints bring in myriad of problems in a person's life making them more vulnerable to emotional outbursts due to additional stress added as a result of financial constraints. Moreover, having financial stability brings a sense of independence and a sense of control in one's life, resulting in making women better able to handle their emotions.

Conclusion

The current study shows that there is a significant negative correlation between loneliness and emotional regulation, where age and financial status has a significant impact on feelings of loneliness and emotional regulation. Thus, not having a partner or close family member with whom one can share the happy and sad moments of one's life can lead to feelings of loneliness. However, having a sense of financial security and independence can reduce the impact of loneliness and leads to better emotional stability among unmarried working women.

Limitations and Suggestions

The current research has certain limitations which should be addressed in future research. Firstly, the sample was only taken from Lahore which is an urban city, in future, researchers should try to collect a representative sample from all major cities of Pakistan both urban and rural to enhance generalizability. Secondly, the data was collected via questionnaires which may lead to social desirability effect, in future, mixed method approach can be used so that the reasons for loneliness and emotional dysregulation can also be explored. Thirdly, the sample size was unequal, taking equal number of women from different age brackets can help further assess the impact of age on the study variables.

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Contribution of Authors

Zahra Ejaz: Conceptualization, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft
 Naema Sarfaraz: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Review & Editing
 Ayesha Sarfaraz: Formal Analysis, Writing – Review & Editing

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by authors.

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