

**Perception of Females about Marital Conflicts and Its Role in Mental Health among the Women Living in Shelter Homes**Tooba Azam<sup>1</sup>, Ali Raza Siddique<sup>2\*</sup>**Abstract**

Marital conflict is the phenomenon that involves the suffering of couples with a state of tension and stress as the couple try to carry out their marital roles. The foremost goal of conducting this study was to explore the perception of women about marital conflicts and how those marital conflicts relate to the mental health of women living in shelter homes. The design used in this study was qualitative and interviews with a sample of 8 female participants were conducted using purposive sampling. Individual administration was applied and emphasized sample's willingness and cooperation. Thematic analysis was done. The result revealed eight themes i.e., Difference in Perception, Relationship Betrayal, Domestic Abuse, Physical Constraints, Psychological Imbalances, Social Influence, Behavioral Constraints and Internalizing the Blame which further revealed that women who suffered from marital conflicts reported poor mental health status and their perception about marital conflicts was quite negative. They totally blame their spouse and his family for every conflict. The current study has implications for the clinicians and researchers helping them to know about the perception of women about marital conflicts.

**Keywords:** Marital Conflicts, Mental Health, Perception, Shelter Home

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**Introduction**

Conflict can be defined as disagreement and argument about something. Conflicts have many types which include internal versus external conflict, character versus self-conflict, character versus character conflict, character versus nature conflict, character versus supernatural conflict, character versus technology conflict, character versus society conflict, etc. (Bartal, 2011). Marital conflicts can be defined as the state of tension or stress between marital partners which arises arguments

and disagreement between them leading towards the verbal abuse and domestic violence as the couple try to carry out their marital roles (Tolorunleke, 2014). The effects of marital conflicts cannot be neglected. Marital conflicts directly and indirectly affect the mental health of the person suffering from that situation.

According to the societal norms, whenever a partner fails to fulfill the needs and wishes of other partner, negative arguments arise which leads towards the marital conflicts and causes serious effects on mental health leading towards the poor physical health of both partners. Usually, partners in a couple blame each other for the conflicts aroused in marital relationship without accepting the mistakes of oneself. Reasons behind these conflicts are different including childhood marriages, arranged marriages and forced marriages, etc. Marital conflicts can lead to functional impairment and many psychological disorders including depressive disorders, anxiety, stress, eating disorder, trauma, bipolar disorders, personality disorder as well as many

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physical disorders including cardiac disease, cancer, headaches and chronic pains, high blood pressure and alterations in immunological and endocrine system etc. Overall, the findings advocate that marital conflict is a weighty risk factor for psychological and physical health among midlife and older adults.

In Pakistani society, marital conflict is a private matter, as it occurs in the family setup, so no proper interventions are made to focus on its assessment, and policy changes resides in the cultural boundaries. Male dominance is frequently considered as a main cause of the marital conflict in general but on the other hand abuses committed by women cannot be denied. On the same side, perception about the effects of marital conflicts on mental health cannot be neglected. Perception is whatever we see, we recognize and we interpret. Anything introduced to the senses is also perception. The process of ingesting, selecting, arranging, and comprehending sensory data is known as perception. It is said that our brain processes the conflict pain in the same region as physical pain and the intensity of that psychological pain depends upon how intense we perceive. (Stokes et al., 2015).

Earlier researches suggest that women living in shelter homes have vast experience of domestic violence including marital conflicts and due to this kind of violence, their mental health is usually damaged. So, this study aims to find out the perception of women living in shelter home about the marital conflicts. Furthermore, it aims to find out what role does that perception play on the mental health of those women and what role does those conflicts play on the mental health among the women living in shelter home.

### **Rationale**

Marital conflict is the most suffered problem by couples in our society now a days and it can cause devastating effects on the mental health of those couples suffering through it. Whereas, perception about these conflicts plays a major role in resolving

these issues. Considering all these aspects, this study aims to explore that how marital conflicts affect the mental health of women living in shelter homes and what they perceive about it.

### **Objectives**

The main objective of this study were:

1. To examine that what role does marital conflict play in disturbing the mental health of women living in shelter homes.
2. To explore the perception of women living in shelter homes against marital conflicts.
3. To check the psychological role of perception against marital conflicts on the mental health among the women living in shelter homes.
4. To identify the role of perception between marital conflicts and mental health.

### **Research Questions**

The research question includes:

1. What does women living in shelter homes perceive about marital conflicts?
2. What psychological role does the perception against marital conflict play in the mental health of women living in shelter homes?
3. What role does the marital conflicts play in disturbing the mental health of women living in shelter homes?
4. What role does the perception play between marital conflicts and mental health?

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

Qualitative research design was used for the proposed study to explore the perception of women living in shelter homes about marital conflicts and its role in mental health. Data was collected using interview techniques.

#### **Sample**

A sample of 8 women who were suffering through marital conflicts with an age range of 18-40 years (Erik Erikson's 6th stage: young adulthood/intimacy versus isolation) were sampled from the shelter home of

Bahawalpur. Purposive sampling technique was used.

### **Instruments**

A self-made but supervisory approved questionnaire was used and was administered through interview technique. Instrument specifically consist of some sort of questions intended to explore the perception of women living in shelter home about marital conflicts and its role in their mental health.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic Analysis was used for this purpose; Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data. Usually, it refers to a collection of writings, like the transcripts of interviews. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly (Clarke et al., 2015).

### **Ethical Considerations**

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants was in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards; including basic principles of informed consent; of voluntary participation; and of protection of their privacy and integrity. The subject will be made aware of their right to refuse to participate in the study at any moment without facing any consequences. After ensuring that the subject has understood the information; the researchers obtain the subjects freely-given informed consent; preferably in writing. If the consent was not obtained in writing; the non-written consent

was formally documented and witnessed. (Trochim, 2006).

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

By documenting, systematizing, and revealing the analysis methods, data analysis has been carried out in a precise, consistent, and thorough way. The study was conducted to explore mental health of women suffering through marital conflicts living in shelter homes. The data was collected through interview technique and was recorded with proper consent of participants for further analysis. After recording enough data, it was analyzed using thematic analysis in which proper codes were selected and themes were constructed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Findings**

The main purpose of this study was to explore the perception of females living in shelter home about marital conflicts and its role in their mental health. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with the women living in shelter homes. Before conducting the interviews their consent to record the data was taken. All participants were agreed to record the data and with their willingness interviews were conducted. Eight to ten questions were posed to get the relevant information from the participants. Each question was structured in a way that participant easily understand.

### **Emerging Themes**

1. Difference in Perception
2. Relationship Betrayal
3. Domestic Abuse
4. Physical Constraints
5. Psychological Imbalances
6. Social Influence
7. Behavioral Constraints
8. Internalizing the Blame

**Table 1**  
*Themes with Codes and Verbatims (N=8)*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes Extracted</b>	<b>Verbatim</b>
Difference in Perception	Individual difference, Future perception, Marital perception, If then perception, Perception about peace, Way out perception, Negative perception, Cultural Perception about remarriage	<p><i>“If your husband keeps good with you then it is a good life otherwise it is like hell.”</i></p> <p><i>“I don’t want to get married again because I think my future would be same as was my past.”</i></p>
Relationship Betrayal	Affections towards other women, Extra marital affair, Deception	<p><i>“The main reasons for all the conflicts is his second marriage, he use to stay out more instead of staying at home.”</i></p> <p><i>“I came here to get divorce. My husband has done third marriage.”</i></p>
Domestic Abuse	Quarrel with husband, Conflicts with husband and his family, Smacking, Physical torture, Cruelty, Divorce, Addiction	<p><i>“Whenever I asked him to stop stealing he used to start fighting with me and once he tore my head off.”</i></p> <p><i>“I had a quarrel with my husband at home and he beat me so I came here.”</i></p>
Physical Constraints	Physical torture, Body pain, Physical aches, Sickness, Fever, Numbness, Headache, Blood pressure	<p><i>“Blood pressure remains low. I became very sick, got issues in my stomach, Pneumonia, TB, heartache and breathing problem.”</i></p> <p><i>“Usually I suffer from body pain, fever and headache.”</i></p>
Psychological Imbalances	Panic attacks, Restlessness, Insomnia, Antisocial behavior, Guilt, Fainting, Suicidal ideations, Confused personality, Numbness, Tensions, Overthinking	<p><i>“I am always worried about the things most of the time I feel restless and nervous. Sometimes, I start laughing and at the other times I start crying.”</i></p> <p><i>“I use to cry a lot. Peace of my mind is totally destroyed.”</i></p>
Social Influence	Proselytization, Thought insertion, Unwillingness, Lack of family support, Lack of in-laws support	<p><i>“My family says no matter how worst it gets just stay in your husband home and settle down there.”</i></p> <p><i>“My family says just settle down in your house.”</i></p>

Behavioral Constraints	Dismissive behavior, Behavioral change, Delaying behavior, Late attitude, Avoidant behavior, Waiting attitude	<i>“They use to stop my husband that don’t do this, you already have kids. But he never listened.”</i> <i>“At first I thought things would get better but later on nothing changed so, I came here.”</i>
Internalizing the Blame	Self-blame, Shifting the blame	<i>“The main reason for all the conflicts is my mother and my husband. My mother guided me wrong and my husband sold my jewelry.”</i> <i>“My family blames me. My mother says that it is all your fault. Sometimes, I just think that if I hadn’t listened to my mother, I were living a happy life.”</i>

**Discussions**

Women who live in shelter home are there mostly due to marital conflicts. Those conflicts play a very clear role in damaging their mental health. Every woman has different perception about those conflicts. Some perceive them as normal part of life and other as very bad. So, the main purpose of this study was to explore the perception of women living in shelter homes about the marital conflicts and what role does those conflicts plays in damaging their mental health. For this purpose, certain self-administered questions were made under proper supervision. After this, thematic analysis was done.

Describing the demographics of the study, eight females suffering through marital conflicts were taken from shelter home with an age range of 18 to 40 years. Out of those eight females only one was educated and the rest were illiterate. The findings of research affirm the devastating effects of marital conflicts on the mental health of women living in shelter homes. It also affirms the negative perception of women living in shelter home about the married life and married conflicts.

Our first research question was “What does women living in shelter homes perceive about marital conflicts?” The theme extracted under this question was “Difference in Perception” with the coding “individual difference, future perception, marital perception, if then perception, perception about peace, way out perception, negative perception, cultural perception, perception about remarriage”. The results showed that a few women perceive that marital life depends on your spouse and other perceive that it is not good life and their spouse is responsible for every conflict.

The second research question was “What psychological role does the perception against marital conflict plays in the mental health of women living in shelter homes?” Results indicate the negative perception of the women living in shelter homes about marital conflicts. They say that their spouse is responsible for every conflict. And due to this perception, they were suffering through overthinking and uncertainty about the future.

The third research question was “What role does the marital conflicts plays in disturbing the mental health of women

living in shelter homes?” Themes under this question were relationship betrayal, domestic violence, physical constraints, psychological imbalances, social influence and behavioral constraints with the codes; dismissive behavior, behavioral change, delaying behavior, late attitude, avoidant behavior, waiting attitude, proselytization, thought insertion, unwillingness, lack of family support, lack of in-laws support, were panic attacks, restlessness, insomnia, antisocial behavior, guilt, fainting, suicidal ideations, confused personality, numbness, tensions, overthinking, physical torture, body pain, physical aches, sickness, fever, numbness, headache, blood pressure, quarrel with husband, conflicts with husband and his family, smacking, physical torture, cruelty, divorce, addiction, affections towards other women, extra marital affair and deception.

The results indicated that most of the conflicts arises due to relationship betrayal and remaining arises due to domestic violence and quarreling. Due to these conflicts the participants showed psychological, behavioral and physical symptoms including body aches, blood pressure issues, fever, heart diseases, panic attacks, suicidal ideations, overthinking, feelings of guilt, avoidant behavior and delaying behavior. Another reason for the conflicts was forcing to stay with husband and insertion of thoughts. Hence, both physical and mental health of women suffering through marital conflicts is disturbed.

The last research question for the study was “What role does the perception plays between marital conflicts and mental health?” The theme under this research question was internalizing the blame and the codes under this theme were self-blame and shifting the blame. The results indicated that women usually perceive her husband and his family as main reason for every conflict and due to this she blames her husband and his family which leads the disturbance in mental health. And in the same way the husband and his family

perceive the women as a main reason for every conflict and shift the blame towards her.

### **Conclusions**

Marital conflicts put negative impact on the mental health of women. The perception about the married life and the conflicts related to it is also negative. People usually blame the opposite party for every conflict and bad event in their life and so has the women living in shelter homes did. The study concluded that marital conflicts not only affect the mental health of women but also affects behaviors and physical health leading towards depression, body pains and delaying behavior.

### **Implications of the Study**

The present study is significant because it gives us the perception of women about the marital conflicts and married life after those conflicts. It also tells us the effects of marital conflicts on the mental health of women and the role of perception against marital conflicts in damaging mental health. It also indicated the role of perception between mental health and marital conflicts. Although many researches have been covers the impact of marital conflicts on mental health but no specific research was conducted under the area of Bahawalpur. So, this research will prove beneficiary for the shelter homes in Bahawalpur and for the future researchers.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study has limitations too. First, is sample size, as interview was conducted from only eight women of shelter home, so the results may not be generalized to a larger population. Secondly, as cross sectional research design has implemented by the researchers, hence it cannot have the predictive power of longitudinal study. And, lastly, only qualitative method has used for data collection, and participants interviews is only poof of the devastating effects marital conflicts, it is recommended for future studies to use quantitative as well as observational methods for data collections.

**Contribution of Authors**

Tooba Azam: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft

Ali Raza Siddique: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision

**Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest declared by authors.

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**Data Availability Statement**

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but are available from the corresponding author [A.R.S.] upon the reasonable request.

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