

## Indicators of Marital Satisfaction in Married Couples

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### ABSTRACT

Understanding the factors which are essential for marital satisfaction can help not only married couples to improve their relationship but it is also beneficial for single individuals to get prepared for the future. The current study was conducted to explore the causes of marital satisfaction among couples living in Bahawalpur. A qualitative, cross-sectional research design was used. Only fertile married couples were included in the study using Snowball Sampling. Questions were generated in the light of Dynamic Goal Theory. Out of 12 couples, every participant was interviewed individually. Verbatim Transcription was applied on the audio recorded interviews. Thematic Analysis of the data explained that husbands and wives like each other because of trusting, respecting, praising and shopping for each other. In a good marital relation, husbands trust their wives leaving them alone at home or outside. They both respect each other in making decisions for practical matters. The most liked topic in a couple's communication was planning the future of kids. Husbands consider marriage as a beautiful phase of life while most wives take marriage in Islamic perspective. Husbands reported that marriage had given them the quality of hard work as compared to wives who got protection. However, both genders reported improved self-confidence after marriage. The results of study are important for premarital counseling and family therapy.

**Key Words:** Marital Satisfaction, Dynamic Goal Theory, Thematic Analysis

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### Introduction

Marriage is a source of relationship between the families. There are several ways to conduct a marriage ceremony according to the customs of various cultures (Stritof, 2019). People marry each other due to different reasons. There are certain rules to conduct a marriage according to civil rights and religious laws (Elista, 2013).

Marital relationship is thought to bring many benefits with it. It provides identity and security to children. It promotes physical and mental health of men and women. It also has economic benefits. It can make a person's life happier and healthier as spouses support each other and their social support also increases (Gallagher, 2000).

Marriages are very strong and important bonds between partners. It is also a basic relationship between humans which is a source of family structure. It is also considered as a primary desired human relationship. A satisfied marital relationship can also be a source of happier life. But to achieve satisfaction in this relationship is not an easy goal. Marriage is a mutual bonding which needs emotional bonding and fulfillment of personal needs as well. So emotional understanding

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between the couples is important for a satisfied relationship (Tummala, 2008). Marriage is a two sided relationship in which both spouses put effort to make their life stable. Some couples seem to be very happy and committed to their bond. They adjust to make their bond stronger enough as it is a source of pleasure for them. On the other hand, there are some people who consider the responsibilities as a burden, they consider adjustment as hardship and thus they lose interest in this affectionate relationship. A healthy and unhealthy marriage depends on the perception of spouses about the problems and efforts to adjust in the relationship (Meyer, 2019). Satisfaction in relationship includes the physical and mental well-being of humans. The results of a qualitative analysis of 40 older couples reflected that satisfied relationship is correlated with healthy psychological state of couples. Depressive symptoms in older age are negatively correlated with happier relationship. Hence, a satisfied relationship is dependent on the healthier psychological state of the old aged couples (Walker et al., 2013). Strong bonding between husband and wife influenced the physical and mental state of the couples. Dissatisfaction in marital relationship can result in health related issues such as insomnia, and weight gain (Kiecolt-Glaser & Wilson, 2017). Satisfaction in the husband-wife dyad is decreased during child rearing, specially, when the child is 1 year old. Both members feel this decrease in marital happiness due to several reasons like finance, privacy, free time available to men and women (Wadsby & Sydsjo, 2001). A cross-sectional study on infertile couples was conducted to see the relationship between satisfaction in marriage and depression among the couples. The results of this study reflected that satisfaction in the husband-wife dyad is affected by the depression among infertile couples (Maroufizadeh et al., 2018). The results of a meta-analysis indicated that satisfaction among the infertile couples is dependent on

several factors including their quality of life, health, social status, social support, and sexual satisfaction (Gelekholaee et al., 2015).

The results of two studies show that communication between the couples is a strong predictor for their satisfaction in relationship. As communication is a source of understanding, by analyzing the communication between partners, we can assess their level of satisfaction in their relationship (Snyder, 1979). Harmony and association between the couples is strongly associated with their adjustment in the relationship (Kazmi & Pervez, 2013).

A study was conducted to assess the correlation between life satisfaction and marital satisfaction as well as effect of age on marital satisfaction. The results of this study showed that life satisfaction and marital satisfaction are positively correlated with each other. Age also affects the life satisfaction of the married couples (Arshad et al., 2014).

In order to explore the determinants of marital sexuality, a study was carried out on personality traits and marital satisfaction. The results showed that only the interaction between the couples matters. It states that satisfaction in the relationship is more important factor than sexual relationship among the couple. This study reflects that those couples are sexually satisfied with each other who have good interactive abilities. As well as, results of this study indicated that sexuality is dependent on gender; sexual interaction is more important for males as compared to females (Schenk et al., 1983).

Literature suggests that sexual satisfaction is important for a satisfied relationship. The results of a research proved that sexually satisfied couples face fewer conflicts in their lives as compared to those who have issues in their sexual satisfaction with partners (Shakarian & Danai, 2014). Some factors of marriage affect the sexual functioning of women. The results of a study showed that women who had more than 3 children had low sexual functioning.

The study further explained that marital relationship longer than 10 years also negatively affected women's sexual functioning (Hassanin & El Amir, 2019).

Children are often considered as a bridge between the married couples. Many studies have been conducted to see that whether infertility affects marital relationship or not. One of those studies was conducted to see the connection between marital satisfaction and infertility related emotional distress. This study showed that stress produced as a result of infertility among the couples affected their emotional distress and satisfaction in relationship. And among two, emotional distress is affected more as compared to the satisfaction due to infertility (Gana & Jakubowska, 2016).

It is interesting to note that a study was conducted to measure the relationship among emotional stability and satisfied relationship on religious basis. The results revealed a positive correlation between emotional stability and satisfied bonding among the couples in terms of Islamic perspective. It means that couple shows emotional stability as much as they are satisfied with each other (Khalatbari & Safaryazdi, 2013).

A research was done to see the relationship among personality traits and marital satisfaction among Iranian couples. Big five personality traits were examined among the married couples. This study showed that neuroticism is negatively correlated with the marital satisfaction among the students. One of the reasons for dissatisfaction in husband wife dyad is neuroticism in any of the partner (Javanmard & Garegozlo, 2013).

The results of another study reflected that there exists a relationship between introvert and extrovert personality and marital satisfaction. This study talks over gender differences by revealing that introvert females and extrovert males are satisfied from their marital relationship (Boyce & Ferguson, 2016). Results of another study disclose that marital satisfaction is not dependent on the length of relationship,

rather than it is dependent on good communication between the couple and high self-esteem of the members (Oprisan & Cristea, 2012).

A study was conducted to see the effects of demographic variables on the husband-wife dyad. This study showed that marital satisfaction is negatively affected by the number of children, age and length of the relationship. On the other hand, education is positively correlated with satisfaction among the couples. The more the members are educated, their satisfaction and understanding are high with each other (Madanian et al., 2013).

Perfectionism is another factor which can influence any relationship. Perfectionism can either be positive or negative. Positive perfectionism indicates well-organized and goal oriented approach while negative perfectionism is a compulsive behavior. Results of a study indicated that marital satisfaction is positively affected by the positive perfectionism and is negatively rated with the negative perfectionism (Gol & Goudarzi, 2013).

The results of another study revealed that satisfied couples are committed to each other. They have a trust worthy relationship and consult each other for decision making. But the management procedures among traditional and non-traditional couples are different (Asoodeh & Lavasani, 2010). Another study exposed the importance of communication between the partners. It showed a positive relationship between marital satisfaction and the approach of mutual decision making regarding family issues (Madahi & Javidi, 2013).

The different researches showed that marriage is a very important phase of life. And satisfaction in this relationship also affects other areas of life as well as it is affected by the different factors of lives of couples. A study was conducted to check the relation between satisfaction in job and marriage among women. The results indicated that marital satisfaction has an impact on the job satisfaction in females. The more marriage brings distress, the

more will be dissatisfaction at workplace (Ashkzari & Ashkezari, 2017).

### **Rationale of the Study**

In order to build a healthy and happy society, there is a dire need to promote marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is an important aspect of a couple's life. In 1938, researchers published first book which discussed differences between happy and unhappy marriages (Gottman & Notarius, 2002). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the scientific researches in the area of marital satisfaction grabbed the attention from scholars of various orientations (Thomas et al., 2000). In the cultures where joint family system is common, it is crucial to explore which factors predict better quality of couple relationship. As the divorce rate is increasing day by day, researches on marriage can help not only to decrease the occurrences of divorce but also useful for prevention programs where the goal is to enhance the satisfaction of already adjusted couples. This activity is performed in order to avoid future problems (Markman et al., 1986). The current research is significant as it uncovers facts about the relationship of happy couples living in Bahawalpur. The study has important implications for social psychologists, couple counselors and family therapists to improve mutual relations of spouses (Estrada, 2009). We may enhance marital satisfaction of couples if we have an understanding of gender related differences in marital satisfaction. Such researches are also useful for prevention programs where the goal is to enhance the satisfaction of already adjusted couples.

### **Objective of the Study**

The study was conducted with objectives to explore the factors leading to the marital satisfaction among married couples and to identify indicators of marital satisfaction from the view point of both members of a married couple (husbands and wives).

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

A cross-sectional, qualitative research design was used to conduct the study.

### **Participants & Sampling**

This study was conducted on 12 couples living in Bahawalpur, who had been married from 3 years and were fertile also. Their age range was 25 to 40 years. Most of the participants had higher education degree. Some belonged to nuclear family system while others were living in joint family system. Participants were from different socioeconomic statuses. Snowball sampling procedure was used to collect the data as this technique was more feasible in order to approach the satisfied married couples.

**Inclusion Criteria.** Data was collected from the couples who were married for more than three years. Only those couples were included in the study who had been living together and have not experienced a major clash and described themselves as satisfied verbally. This was done because satisfied couples can better describe the factors of marital satisfaction in the light of their personal experiences.

**Exclusion Criteria.** Infertile couples and those couples who did not consider themselves satisfied with their marriage were excluded from this study.

### **Procedure**

A questionnaire was generated which consisted of 5 questions. All questions were generated from the Dynamic Goal Theory of Marital Satisfaction where three types of goals (instrumental, personal, and companionship) are considered the central aims of marital relationship. Data were then collected by audio recording of face to face structured interviews from the couples. In the start of interviews, all participants were first asked whether they were satisfied from their marriage. The interview proceeded only when participant answered yes. One

interview was discarded where a wife replied that she was not satisfied with her marriage. Then transcribing verbatim strategy was used for those interviews. After a careful review, the written content was analyzed by Thematic Content Analysis and themes were generated.

### **Ethical Considerations**

At the start of every interview, participant was verbally assured of the confidentiality of data and that their data will be used only for research purpose. All interviews were recorded with the permission of participants. Participants were also given the right to withdraw from the interview if they felt unwilling to answer any question at any stage of interview.

## **Results**

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Overall Sample (12 couples)*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b><i>f</i></b>	<b>%</b>
Age	25-40	12	100
Socioeconomic Status	Lower	02	17
	Middle	08	66
	Upper	02	17
Qualification	Educated	10	84
	Uneducated	02	16
Work Status	Both Working	06	50
	One Working	06	50
Family System	Joint	08	66
	Nuclear	04	34

*Note.* The Table 1 gives the frequency distribution of demographic characteristics of the sample.

**Table 2***Themes (with frequency of occurrence) generated by Thematic Content Analysis (12 couples)*

<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Themes of Answers from Husbands</b>	<b>Themes of Answers from Wives</b>
1	What are the reasons you like your spouse?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Praises my dressing, appearance and deeds (9)</li> <li>• Does shopping for me (8)</li> <li>• Trusts my decisions (7)</li> <li>• Values me more than her parents (6)</li> <li>• She selects dresses for me (4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Praises my appearance and deeds (12)</li> <li>• Fulfills my needs (11)</li> <li>• Respects my family (10)</li> <li>• Takes me for outing (8)</li> <li>• Respects me (8)</li> <li>• Trusts me (7)</li> <li>• Listens attentively (6)</li> <li>• When he's with me, ignores others (5)</li> </ul>
2	In which situations do you trust your spouse?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In making decisions for kids (12)</li> <li>• When she is alone at home or outside (8)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In practical decisions about finances, dealing with relatives, for kids (12)</li> </ul>
3	What are the best topics in your day to day communication?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning the future of kids (10)</li> <li>• Remembering communication before marriage (6)</li> <li>• She can read my eyes and my body language (5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning the future of kids (11)</li> <li>• Household matters (10)</li> <li>• Discussing personal problems (9)</li> </ul>
4	What is the meaning of marriage according to you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility (10)</li> <li>• Beautiful phase of life (7)</li> <li>• Basic Necessity without which life is incomplete (6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fulfilling Sunnah (10)</li> <li>• Responsibility (10)</li> <li>• Getting a friend (4)</li> <li>• Safety and security (9)</li> </ul>
5	What this new relation has given you/ added to your life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard work (11)</li> <li>• Self-confidence (10)</li> <li>• Responsibility (8)</li> <li>• A friend (8)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection 12</li> <li>• Self Confidence (11)</li> <li>• Respect in society (10)</li> </ul>

- 
- New social relations (5)
  - Maturity (9)
  - Patience (8)
  - Kids and new social relations (8)
  - Compromise (5)
  - Independence (4)
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## Discussion

The present research attempted to uncover the gender differences in indicators of marital satisfaction among married couples living in Bahawalpur. The research employed structured interviews to know the views of each partner of a dyad on marital satisfaction. The gender differences in different indicators enumerate the values of our traditional culture. The gender differences on indicators of marital satisfaction have been discussed in detail below:

The husbands described trust, doing shopping for me and praising as the main factors for liking of their wives. Wives, on the other hand, described praise, trust, respect for her and her family and spending time together as the main factors for liking of their husbands. Praise is the common theme in both husbands and wives liking toward each other. This is in contrast to common belief that only wives like to be praised. This research proves otherwise.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> question asks couples about situations in which you trust your spouse the most. The husbands list having their wives alone at home as the primary situation where they trust their wives. On the other hand, wives trust the husbands for making all practical decisions. This demonstrates the couples' adjustment to their patriarchal society where wives respect their husbands' right of taking care of everyday practical matters.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> question explored gender differences in topics of daily communication among couples. The husbands liked their wives asking for opinion in every matter and planning for the future of kids whereas wives liked to

discuss household matters, personal problems and planning the future of kids. Planning for kids appeared a common area of concern for both partners of a couple. This is consistent with previous findings (Zaheri et al., 2016).

The 4<sup>th</sup> question asked about defining the concept of marriage from the couples. Both husbands and wives considered marriage as a phase of life adding and demanding responsibility sharing. Husbands considered marriage a beautiful phase of life. Wives considered marriage as a means to fulfill sunnah of Holy Prophet, and as a bond providing them with safety and security in society. This theme has been prevalent in all eastern communities.

The 5<sup>th</sup> question asked what marriage had added to the lives of couples. The husbands reported improving self-confidence, making them working hard for the family, giving them a friend in the form of wife. The wives reported protection as the main addition of marriage in their lives. Besides, they reported improving self-confidence, gaining respect, becoming mature and developing new social relations. Marriage has traditionally been a social contract where women derive special meanings and define their selves in the context of their marriage (Qadir et al., 2005).

## Strengths and Implications

The uncovering gender differences in key indicators of marital satisfaction are the main strengths of the study. It gives details of which partner in a couple values the most when considering marital satisfaction. The study provides new findings about the aspects of marriage from the husbands' point of view. These findings should help

couples live a healthy and happy life. Furthermore, counselors and family therapists can also benefit from the results of this research in their day to day practice with the couples.

### Limitations

The researchers did not use any screening tool for marital satisfaction before conducting interviews. All participants were verbally questioned if they were satisfied from marriage. Future researchers should use a tool for this purpose.

The role of demographic characteristics in marital satisfaction has not been included. If infertile couples are also included in future researches, interesting results would be drawn.

### Conclusion

There is always a need to know about the elements associated with marital satisfaction. Gender differences do exist in the perception of factors which make couples feel satisfied from marriage. In the light of this research, it was explored that in both genders, the ways of mutual interaction and dealing are more important than personal traits of partners for marital satisfaction. Research concludes that in order to be more satisfied in a marriage, each individual from couple should interact the partner with more respect, care, mutual praise, and clear communication.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflict of interest.

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