Body Image Concern, Sexual Esteem and Marital Satisfaction in Young Married Adults

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Abstract

This correlational research aims to study body image concerns, sexual esteem and marital satisfaction in young married adults. The sample consist of $N = 163$ young married adults from Lahore, Pakistan. The measures included Body Image Concern Scale (He et al., 2017), Sexual Esteem Scale (Snell & Papini, 1989) and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (Fowers & Olson, 1993) in addition to demographic information sheet. The findings revealed that body image concerns negatively (-0.34, $p < .001$) while sexual esteem positively (0.42, $p < .001$) relates to marital satisfaction. Significant gender differences revealed that men tend to have better sexual esteem ($t = 2.90$, $df = 161$, $p < 0.01$) and marital satisfaction ($t = 2.01$, $df = 161$, $p < 0.05$) than women. Increase in total family income, marital satisfaction tends to increase. The mediation analysis revealed that sexual esteem serves as a mediator between concerns about body image and marital satisfaction. The study implies potential development of therapeutic interventions for enhancing marriage satisfaction and addressing societal stigmatization of body ideals for improved marital quality.

Keywords: Body Image Concerns, Marital Satisfaction, Mediation, Sexual Esteem

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Introduction

In today's modern and contemporary world, understanding the dynamics of intimate relationships is quite intricate and requires consistent research in this domain in order to navigate the changing perceptions. Body image concerns and sexuality related constructs have emerged as themes that might serve as crucial elements when it comes to marital satisfaction and modern researches in this domain. There might be a paucity in empirical investigations involving these elements in Pakistani married adults following the ethical and cultural norms that are prevalent when it comes to interpersonal relationships. This research intends to link the divide by examining the connection among body image concerns, sexual esteem and marital satisfaction in young married adults.

Body image is a broadly studied construct in the field of psychology. It is a multifaceted construct that covers affective, cerebral, perceptual and interactive aspects related to one's body and outlook (Atkinson & Diedrichs, 2021). Cash (2012) has defined body image by quoting that "the way people experience their embodiment, particularly but not precisely, their physical appearance". Body image itself is a vast terminology, which covers facets such as physical and functional competencies, biological integrity such as health, fitness, illness and skills related to athletics and coordination. The experiences in terms of the appearance consists of two distinct features. The first one is the perception of the appearance which refers to the mental image of the size, shape and facial features. The second one is the attitude towards the appearance (Cash, 2012).

Sexual esteem is a multifaceted concept that evolves based on an individual's previous sexual encounters (Snell et al., 1992). Snell and Papini (1989) explain the construct of Sexual esteem is defined as a positive attitude and confidence in the ability to engage in satisfying and enjoyable sexual experiences. Sexual esteem is assessed based on the sexual competence, sexual self-acceptance and a sexual identity overall. Sexual engagement and sexual functioning well cater the sexual esteem concept in order to sustain a greater relationship satisfaction (Peixoto et al., 2018).

Evaluating individual and relationship wellbeing has always courted for the cross-culture predictors such as marital status. Marital satisfaction is defined as the quality of a married couple's union. Marital satisfaction is a construct that umbrellas factors such as thoughts, feelings and behaviors related to their relationship with the alleged partner (Dobrowolska et al., 2020; Hendrick, 1988). Previously, marriages were evaluated based on many different constructs such as marital quality, marital adjustment, marital happiness, marital stability etc. All these constructs were somewhat similar and overlapping. Marital satisfaction on the other hand is defined as "One's global personal assessing the quality of their marriage based on the marital satisfaction theory based on dynamic goals. (Li & Fung, 2011).

To explore the connection between the physique, intimacy, and sexual contentment in the lives of married women Farhan and Ismail (2022) led research in Pakistan which explored the association between duration of marriage and its impact on sexual satisfaction. Sample consisted of 294 married females, with age range 25-28 to see how intimacy and body shape impact on sexual satisfaction. The study findings indicated that as the age of married women increases, along with a higher number of children, there is a noticeable influence on their sexual satisfaction and personal intimacy. Moreover, the findings demonstrated a connection among personal intimacy, sexual satisfaction, and the length of the marital union. In particular, women who were married indicated elevated levels of personal intimacy and sexual satisfaction during the initial year of marriage in contrast to the fifth year of marriage.

In contrast to the previous research which was solely conducted on omen, Zubair and Ali (2019) undertook a study to determine how men see life after marriage. The study focuses on how single men perceive and comprehend cultural norms about post-marriage bodies of both sexes. Late teenagers and early adults made up the sample, and in-depth interviews were conducted. According to the study's findings, gender expectations regarding the body after marriage are biased and paradoxical in nature. And research revealed that males prioritize their own bodies over those of their spouses and modesty. Men are not typically held to the same standards when it comes to body image, but if they take care of their bodies, it is more for their own needs and is generally acceptable as a husband demand. Rationale of the study can be derived from both cultural and contextual backgrounds. Previous literature entails researches on a relatively different construct i.e., relationship satisfaction rather than marital satisfaction when exploring sexuality related constructs particularly in the international studies. The complexity of marital satisfaction is more diverse as it involves legal precedents. Pakistan is a culturally diverse country with societal norms, ethics and traditions, which are held significant in terms of relationships, which would ultimately influence satisfaction in relationships. Addressing the research void, the study formulated the following hypotheses:

1. Marital satisfaction is expected to have a negative correlation with body image concerns, while it is anticipated to have a positive correlation with sexual esteem.

2. Sexual esteem acts as a mediator in the relationship between body image concerns and marital satisfaction.
3. Sociodemographic variables are likely to predict marital satisfaction.

Theoretical Framework

To explore the mediating function of sexual esteem between body image concerns and marital satisfaction, the risk regulation framework presented by Murray and colleagues (2006) is the most significantly entailed theory. The theory focuses on the perceived regard received from the significant other ensuring the quality of marital satisfaction (Lee, 2016; Murray et al., 2006). The model explains the fact that people who are expressed with love, acceptance and regarded with unconditional importance, develop a sense of security towards their partner, which helps them to engage in emotionally risky yet essential marital quality enhancing acts such as, sexual intimacy (Lee, 2016). Keeping this in mind, it can be inferred that people with low body image will lack the confidence to engage in sexually intimate experiences, which would consequently affect their marital satisfaction in a negative manner. According to the risk regulation model, women with poor body image tend to perceive sexual rejection even without a clear expression of feeling from the significant other. These women are less likely to indulge in sexual experiences due to lack of desire, initiation of an intimate act and sexual engagement. Meltzer and McNulty (2010) stated that poor body image is strongly associated with decreased levels of desire towards a sexual activity and lack of sexual assertiveness, which would ultimately cause the person to less frequently engage in a sexual activity.

The sociodemographic factors such as gender, age, family income, body mass index etc. are likely to be associated with marital satisfaction either directly or indirectly. Gender may play an important role in determining marital satisfaction. Ashdown et al. (2011) stated that some correlates of sexual satisfaction have shown differences in terms of gender. The length of marriage, and age have also been associated previously with sexual satisfaction (McNulty & Fisher, 2007). As Lee (2016) states that sexual satisfaction is associated with marital satisfaction, then the sociodemographic are likely to be associated with marital satisfaction as well. This theoretical framework can be conceptualized as:

Figure 1

Mediation representing Sexual Esteem as mediator (M) on the connection among Body Image Concerns (X) and Marital Satisfaction (Y)
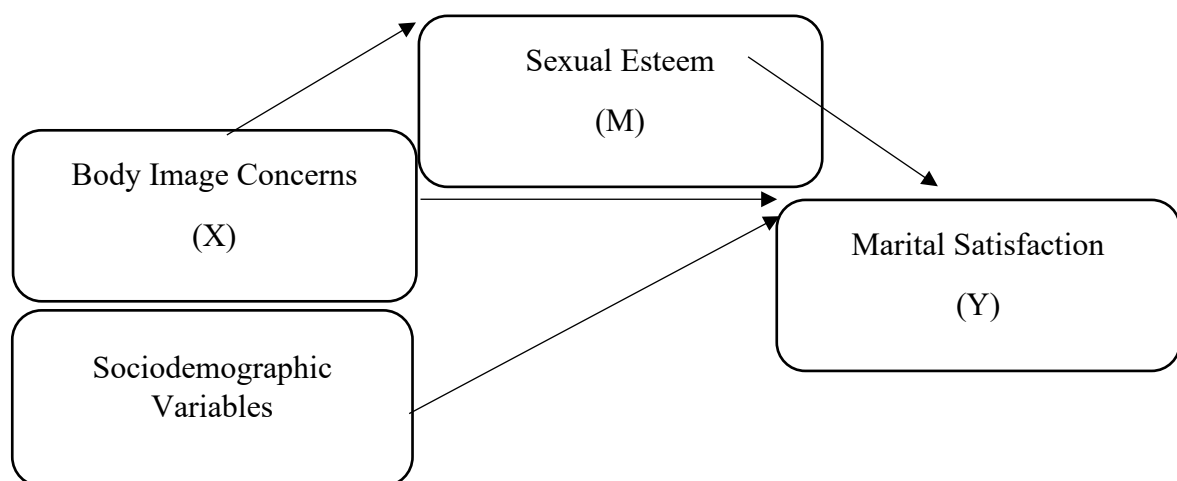
Method
Research Design and Sampling Strategy
This study of a quantitative nature utilized a cross-sectional research design. Data collection was conducted through a non-probability, purposive sampling strategy, utilizing both online and physical modes with the administration of questionnaires.

Participant Characteristics
The sample comprised of 163 young married adults from the district Lahore, Pakistan. The sample size was determined using G-power. Participants with minimum duration of one year in marriage were included in the research study. Individuals with any chronic physical illness, diagnosed mental illness and disability were screened out from the research in order to control for the confounding variables.

Instruments
Demographic Sheet
A demographic sheet measuring various sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, family system, residency, number of siblings, birth order, family income, years of marriage, number of children, gender of children etc. were included. The form also included sections for recording individual and partner measurements, including weight and height, to calculate the Body Mass Index (BMI) for both spouses.

Body Image Concerns Scale
He et al. (2017) developed the body image concern scale, which comprises of six subscales. For the current research study, we utilized 3 subscales; appearance dissatisfaction, pre-occupation with reassurance and defect hiding due to more contextual relevance. These comprised a total of 14 items, with each one being assessed on a 5-point Likert scale.

Sexual Esteem Scale (SES)
Sexual esteem scale is a sub branch of the full fledge Sexuality Scale developed by William E. Snell Jr. in 1989. The sexuality scale serves as a instrument for assessing sexual esteem, sexual depression, and sexual pre-occupation. This subscale comprises 10 items, including five reverse-coded ones. The scoring of the items is done using a five-point Likert scale that ranges from 0 to 4. Other inventories/questionnaires that are liable to measure the construct of sexual esteem include the sexual awareness questionnaire (Snell et al., 1991), sexual self-esteem inventory in women (SSEI-W) developed by Zeanah and Schwarz (1996) and sexual self esteem – modified version (O'Sullivan et al., 2006) were developed to assess the levels of 38 sexual esteem in adolescents and women respectively. The questionnaires were not suitable for men and women alike. Therefore, resorting to an older scale was a necessity

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale
Fowers and Olson (1993) developed The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale, designed to assess and nurture aspects related to relationship issues, communication, and happiness. It is a 15-item questionnaire with six reverse coded items. The scales consist of two subscales, the subscale for marital satisfaction and the subscale for idealistic distortions. The marital satisfaction items are 10 in number while the idealistic distortion scale consists of 5 items. Each of the one item of marital satisfaction subscale measures one domain previously present in the full-length ENRICH Inventory. The Idealistic Distortion scale contributes to the formation of the marital conventionalization through its 5 items. (Fowers & Olson, 1993). Every item was evaluated utilizing a 5-point Likert scale.

Procedure
Before starting the research, official permission was taken from concerned authorities of the Institute of Applied Psychology. Permission from the authors for using their scales was taken before using them in the research. A suitable time and day in a week were allotted for the collection of the data and a schedule was decided. Concerned authorities were informed regarding this research. The participants of the research were selected

on the basis of exclusion and inclusion criteria and sampling strategy as mentioned above. Then for further collection of the data, consent was taken from participants. Participants were given the questionnaires that they had to fill in 15-20 minutes.

Statistical Analyses

The data analysis for the study was conducted using IBM's SPSS version 26. Descriptive analysis was employed to calculate the mean and standard deviation of the 21 demographic variables. The reliability of the scales and subscales used in the study was assessed through Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis. Furthermore, Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the correlation between study variables and demographics. To identify predictors of the dependent variable, Multiple Linear Regression analysis was performed. Mediation analysis using regression in SPSS was carried out to investigate the mediating role of sexual esteem between body image concerns and marital satisfaction. Finally, Sobel's test was utilized to assess the significance of partial mediation.

Ethical Considerations

Participants gave informed consent to confirm their voluntary involvement in the study. Their privacy was assured, and they maintained the right to withdraw from the research at any stage.

Results

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients of the Measures (N = 163)

Variables	*a*	*K*	*M*	*SD*	Range	
					Maximum	Minimum
Sexual Esteem	.87	10	38.89	8.21	4.18	3.61
Body Image Concerns	.89	14	29.76	11.53	3.17	1.46
Appearance Dissatisfaction	.87	4	7.55	4.04	2.08	1.70
Preoccupation with Reassurance	.79	6	12.60	5.14	2.76	1.46
Defect Hiding	.73	4	9.61	4.25	3.17	1.98
ENRICH Marital Satisfaction	.84	15	58.85	9.78	4.22	3.44
Idealistic Distortion	.72	5	19.95	3.84	4.22	3.69
Marital Satisfaction	.75	10	39.01	6.68	4.20	3.04

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, α = Reliability coefficient and K = No. of items.

Sexual esteem scale consisted of 10 items and its Cronbach's alpha value came out to be α=.87 which is a very sound value for reliability. The body image concerns scale consisted of 14 items with three domains namely appearance dissatisfaction with 4 items, preoccupation with reassurance that consisted of 6 items and hiding defects which constituted 4 items as well. The Cronbach's alpha reliability for appearance dissatisfaction subscale came out as the highest one. The ENRICH marital satisfaction scale consisted of 2 subscales. One of them measured the marital satisfaction while the other one measured the idealistic distortions in marriage. The scale comprised 15 items, including 5 items related to idealistic distortions and 10 items assessing marital satisfaction. The Cronbach's alpha value for the overall scale was determined to be α=0.84.

Table 2
Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences (N=163)

Variable (Gender)	Men		Women		t (163)	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			*LL*	*UL*	
Body Image Concerns	28.94	11.81	30.39	11.34	-.79	.42	-5.05	2.15	0.13
Sexual Esteem	40.97	7.09	37.28	8.68	2.90	.004**	1.18	6.19	0.46
Marital Satisfaction	60.59	9.37	57.51	9.92	2.01	.04*	.05	6.10	0.32

*Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, CI= Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit, ** = p <0.01, * = p <0.05*

The independent samples *t*-test performed had all the assumptions fulfilled. Thus, it can be inferred that the samples were roughly equal to each other. The findings revealed a noteworthy disparity between men and women concerning sexual esteem. (*t* = 2.90, *df* = 161, *p* <0.01) and marital satisfaction (*t* = 2.01, *df* = 161, *p* <0.05). There were no significant differences attributed for body image concerns. From the above presented results, it can be inferred that men (*M* = 40.97, *SD* = 7.09) and women (*M* = 37.28, *SD* = 8.68) have significant gender differences in levels of sexual esteem. Further, it can also be inferred that men and women have significant gender differences in levels of marital satisfaction as well.

The effect size for the t-test is quantified by the Cohen's d value. It determines the magnitude of difference exhibited. The gender differences between sexual esteem of men and women have a Cohen's d value of d = 0.46, which represents a moderate effect size. On the other hand, the gender differences between marital satisfaction of men and women had a Cohen's d value which represents a small effects size.

Table 3
Independent Sample t-test for Comparing Means of Family Systems (N=163)

Variable (Gender)	Nuclear		Joint		t (163)	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			*LL*	*UL*	
Body Image Concerns	30.79	12.27	28.61	10.61	1.20	.75	-1.39	5.75	.19
Sexual Esteem	39.08	7.66	38.68	8.84	.314	.23	-2.15	2.96	.04
Marital Satisfaction	60.08	9.52	57.48	9.95	1.71	.90	-.41	5.61	.26

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation

Further an independent sample t-test was conducted to examine differences in means of family system in terms of body image concerns, sexual esteem and marital satisfaction in young married adults. All assumptions were fulfilled. Roughly, equal means were reported and non-significant results were obtained. These results infer that there is no difference in means of nuclear family system (*M* = 60.08, *SD* = 9.52) and joint family system (*M* = 57.48, *SD* = 9.95) in levels of marital satisfaction.

Table 4.1

ANOVA for Comparing Means of Various Family Income Groups (N=163)

Measure	Below 100,000		101,000–200,000		201,000 +		p	F (160,2)	η^2
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
BIC	30.37	12.76	28.72	9.95	30.37	12.08	.680	0.38	*.04*
SE	36.37	9.34	39.68	8.17	40.44	6.48	.026*	3.72	*.30*
M.S	55.16	10.52	60.17	9.56	60.96	8.34	.004**	5.70	.25

*Note: **p < .01, BIC = Body Image Concern, SE = Sexual Esteem, M.S = Marital Satisfaction*

All assumptions were fulfilled. Assumption of homogeneity of variances was also fulfilled. Results indicated a significant mean difference among the income groups ($F = 5.70$, *dfw* = 160, dfb = 2, $p < .01$) for levels of marital satisfaction. Significant mean differences were also obtained in terms of family income groups for levels of sexual esteem ($F = 3.72$, *dfw* = 160, *dfb* = 2, $p < .05$). No significant mean differences were reported within family income groups for levels of body image concerns.

In order to determine the comparative mean differences of three income groups for sexual esteem and marital satisfaction, a Tukey Post Hoc analysis was conducted. The results for the Post Hoc test are presented in table 4.2:

Table 4.2

Post Hoc Comparison for Family Income Groups (N=163)

Group	Comparison Group	Mean Difference
Sexual Esteem		
Below 100,000 PKR	101,000 – 200,000 PKR	-3.31
	201,000 PKR +	-4.07*
101,000 – 200,000 PKR	201,000 PKR +	-.75
Marital Satisfaction		
Below 100,000 PKR	101,000 – 200,000 PKR	-5.01*
	201,000 PKR +	-5.81**
101,000 – 200,000 PKR	201,000 PKR +	.795

*Note: *p < .05, **p < .01*

From the results reported by the post hoc analysis, it could be deduced that there is significant pair wise difference among the third income group i.e., PKR 201,000 + and the first income group i.e., below PKR 100,000 in levels of sexual esteem (MD = 3.31, $p < .05$). The analysis explains that the more the family income, the greater the levels of sexual esteem. Third income group was higher in marital satisfaction than second and third income group. There was significant pair wise difference among first and second income group and first income group were lower in level of marital satisfaction than that of second income group (MD = 5.01, $p < .05$). Furthermore, there was a significant pair wise difference among first and third income group i.e., below PKR 100,000 and PKR 201,000 + in levels of marital satisfaction and first income group was lower in marital satisfaction levels than third income group (MD = 5.81, $p < .01$). No significant pair wise difference was found between second income group and third income group i.e., PKR 101,000 – PKR 200,000 and PKR 201,000 + in levels of marital satisfaction.

Table 5.1

Inter-correlation between Study Variables (N=163)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sexual Esteem	-	-.37***	-.35***	-.30***	-.30***	.42***	.40***
Body image concerns		-	.80***	.92***	.83***	-.34***	-.29***
Appearance Dissatisfaction			-	.63***	.45***	-.38***	-.33***
Preoccupation Reassurance				-	.69***	-.31***	-.23**
Defect Hiding					-	-.19*	-.14*
Marital Satisfaction						-	.87***
Idealistic Distortions							-

*Note: *** = p < .001, ** = p < .01, * = p < .05*

It was hypothesized that there is likely to be a significant correlation between body image concerns, sexual esteem and marital satisfactions. Body image concerns is strongly correlated with sexual esteem, marital satisfaction, idealistic distortions, appearance dissatisfaction, preoccupation with reassurance and defect hiding. All the variables were correlated with each other in positive or negative dimensions. Body image concerns and its three dimensions were negatively correlated with sexual esteem. Marital satisfaction exhibited a positive correlation with sexual esteem and idealistic distortions, while body image concerns showed a negative correlation with marital satisfaction and idealistic distortions. Additionally, sexual esteem demonstrated a positive correlation with marital satisfaction and idealistic distortions. Other than the domains of body image concerns, the strongest correlation exists between sexual esteem and marital satisfaction (0.42, $p < .001$). Additionally, a strong negative correlation exists between sexual esteem and body image concerns (-.37, $p < .001$).

These results indicate that the higher the body image concern, the lower the sexual-esteem and vice versa. Similarly, the higher the sexual esteem, the higher the marital satisfaction and the higher the body image concerns, the lower the marital satisfaction.

Table 5.2

Correlation between Study Variables and Demographic Variables (N=163)

Variables	SE	BIC	AD	PWR	HD	MS	ID
Age	-.05	-.02	.01	-.02	-.04	-.06	.02
No. of Siblings	-.03	.22**	.12	.22**	.21**	-.09	-.09
Years of Marriage	-.07	.08	.11	.06	.04	-.12	-.07
Individual BMI	.21**	.01	.09	.02	-.08	.06	.03
Partner BMI	-.04	.08	.06	.08	.07	-.09	-.18*

*Note: *** = p <.001, ** = p < .01, * = p < .05, SE = Sexual Esteem, BIC = Body Image Concerns, AD = Appearance Dissatisfaction, PWR = Preoccupation with Reassurance, HD = Hiding Defects, MS = Marital Satisfaction, ID = Idealistic Distortions.*

It was also hypothesized that sociodemographic factors will be correlated with study variables. The results suggest that there is no correlation between age and study variables. This implies that with the increase in age, there is no effect on body image concern, sexual esteem and marital satisfaction. Number of siblings was significantly correlated with body image concerns, preoccupation with reassurance and hiding defects. Years of marriage were not correlated with any of the study

variables. Individuals Body Mass Index BMI was significantly correlated with sexual esteem while partner's BMI was significantly correlated with idealistic distortions. A positive association exists among number of siblings and body image concerns (.22, $p < .01$) which suggest that the more the siblings the greater the body image concerns.

Table 6

Linear Regression Analysis entailing the Predictors of Marital Satisfaction (N=163)

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Gender	-1.78	2.13	-.09	-6.01	2.42
Age	-.09	.12	-.06	-.33	.14
No. of Siblings	-.13	.48	-.02	-1.07	.83
Total Family Income	1.17	.44	.19**	.31	2.03
Individual – BMI	-.03	.07	-.04	-.16	.12
Partner - BMI	-.02	.06	-.03	-.14	.11
Sexual Esteem	.33	.09	.28**	.15	.52
Appearance Dissatisfaction	-.51	.23	-.21*	-.95	-.06
Preoccupation with reassurance	-.33	.21	-.18	-.75	.08
Defect Hiding	.26	.22	.12	-.18	.69
F	6.24***				
R^2	.291				

Note: CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit, SE = Standard Error

The regression analysis was conducted using the Enter method, and all assumptions were met. The findings revealed that the overall model was statistically significant. Examination of beta values indicated that sexual esteem, appearance dissatisfaction and total family income predict marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is positively predicted by both sexual esteem and total family income while appearance dissatisfaction is a negative predictor of marital satisfaction. Overall, sexual esteem was the strongest predictor followed by appearance dissatisfaction. The model explained 29% variance in marital satisfaction.

Table 7

Regression Analysis for Mediation of Sexual Esteem between Body Image Concerns and Marital Satisfaction (N = 163)

Variables	B	95% CI		SE	β	R²	ΔR²	Criterion
		LL	UL					
Analysis 1								MS
Constant	67.47	63.52	71.43	2.01		.11	.117***	
Body Image Concerns	-.29	-.41	-.16	.063	-.34			
Analysis 2								MS
Constant	39.27	32.60	45.94	3.38		.18	.179***	
Sexual Esteem	.50	.33	.67	.09	*.423*			
Analysis 3								BIC
Constant	46.75	43.47	50.04	1.66		.14	.138***	
Sexual Esteem	-.26	-.37	-.16	.05	*-.37*			
Analysis 4								
Step 1						.12	.117***	MS
Constant	67.47	63.52	71.43	2.01				
Body Image Concerns	-.29	-.41	-.16	.06	-.34			
Step 2						.22	.102***	MS
Constant	48.36	39.28	57.43	4.59				
Body Image Concerns	-.18	-.31	-.06	.06	-.22			
Sexual Esteem	.41	.23	.59	.09	.34			

Note: CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Level, UL = Upper Level, MS = Marital Satisfaction, BIC = Body Image Concerns

Table 7 shows the impact of body image concerns and sexual esteem on marital satisfaction. In Analysis 1, the R^2 value of .117 indicated that body image concerns account for approximately 12% of the variance in marital satisfaction. The results suggested a negative predictive relationship, indicating that body image concerns are associated with lower marital satisfaction. (B = -.34, p <.001). In Analysis 2, the R^2 value of .18 describes that sexual esteem explains 18% variance in marital satisfaction. This finding explains that sexual esteem positively predicts marital satisfaction (B = .423, $p < .001$). Further in analysis 3, the R^2 value of .14 describes that sexual esteem explains 14% variance in body image concerns. This finding explains that sexual esteem negatively predicts body image concerns (B = -.37, $p < .001$).

Further in analysis 4, In Step 1, the R^2 value of .12 indicated that body image concerns account for nearly 12% of the variance in marital satisfaction, as reflected in $F(1,161)$ = 21.28, $p < .001$. The results illustrated that

body image concerns negatively predict marital satisfaction (B = -.34, $p < .001$). In Step 2, the R^2 value of .22 demonstrated that body image concerns explain approximately 22% of the variance in marital satisfaction, as indicated by $F(2,160) = 22.37$, $p < .001$ when sexual esteem is employed as a mediator between the two variables. The findings explained that body image concerns negatively predict marital satisfaction (B = -.22, p <.001) when sexual esteem is employed as a mediator.

The ΔR^2 value of .102 indicated a 10% change in the variance between Model 1 and Model 2, as evidenced by $F(1,160) = 20.83$, $p < .001$. The regression weights for body image concerns decreased from Model 1 to Model 2 (-.34 to -.22), confirming the persistence of significance and affirming the presence of partial mediation. The z-value for Sobel Statistic (-3.96) was greater than -1.96, which confirms that sexual esteem significantly

mediates between body image concerns and marital satisfaction.

Figure 2

A Conceptual Explanation of Mediating Role of Sexual Esteem for Body Image Concerns and Marital Satisfaction
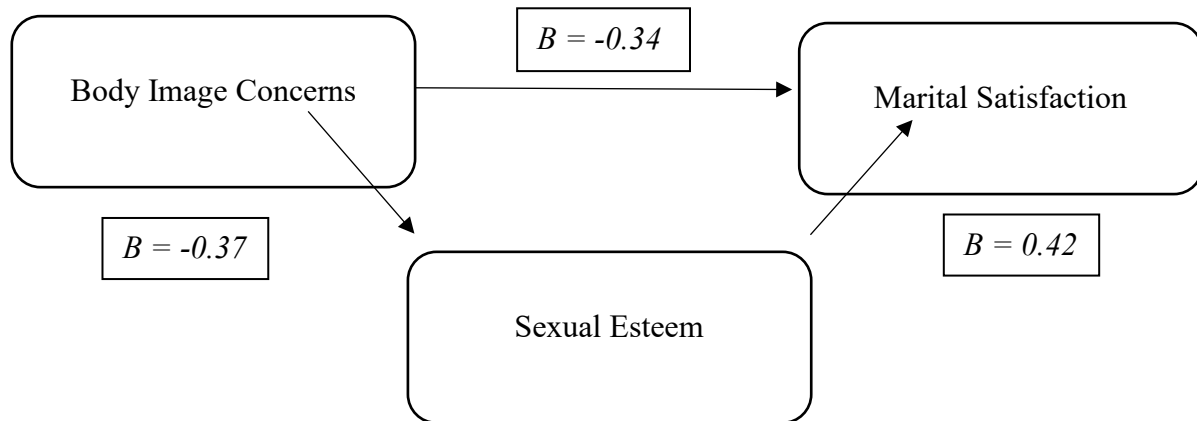
Discussion

Body image concerns have been rising among people due to the odd standards set by fashion industry, the influence of social media and the adverse effect of cultural and societal myths, which regard one body shape for all. People tend to scrutinize different shapes and sizes men and women have and failed to realize that this might produce a negative effect in an individual's life both emotionally and socially. Negative comments from people tend to have an emotional turmoil on individuals' life especially in terms of their confidence. This may hinder their sexual esteem and negative effect their sexual satisfaction, which is a core element of marital satisfaction between couples (Peixoto et al., 2018).

It was hypothesized that there would be a negative association with body image concerns, whereas a positive association would be expected with sexual esteem in relation to marital satisfaction. The results indicated that the body image concerns did in fact negatively correlate with marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction was significantly predicted by the three domains of body image concerns, with appearance dissatisfaction emerging as a particularly influential factor. Other domains i.e.,

preoccupation with reassurance and defect hiding were also associated with marital satisfaction negatively. Lee (2016) directed a research study in order to fill the gap associated with body image dissatisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction, trying to understand why these variables are related so significantly. Study revealed that individuals who were dissatisfied with their bodies perceived that their partner share the same negative feeling irrespective of the actual feeling of the partners. This leads to lower satisfaction in marriage.

The hypothesized model suggested a positive correlation between sexual esteem and marital satisfaction. The results indicated the same, which means that with increased levels of sexual esteem or confidence in one's abilities as a sexual partner, the levels of marital satisfaction increase. Antičević et al. (2017) Stated that sexual esteem is a substantial predictor of sexual satisfaction and Lee (2016) explained There exists a noteworthy correlation between relationship satisfaction and marital satisfaction, representing the quality of the relationship within a marriage. Higher levels of confidence in an individual as a sexual partner definitely helps in establishing a better sexual life and would play a

significant role in maintaining a satisfactory marital life.

It was further hypothesized that sexual esteem is likely to have a mediating role between body image concerns and marital satisfaction. The mediating analysis through regression followed by a Sobel's test indicated that sexual esteem partially mediates between body image concern and marital satisfaction. Body image concerns influence sexual esteem, which in return influence the marital satisfaction. The study conducted by Lee (2016) to understand the mediating factors associated with body image and relationship satisfaction explained that the individual with reduced body image tend to have negative feelings for themselves. Peixoto et al. (2018) studied the mediating function of sexual esteem was identified. It was observed that sexual esteem serves as a partial, rather than complete, mediator between sexual functioning and sexual satisfaction.

The risk regulation model proposed by Murray and Colleagues (2006) explains this mediating role of sexual esteem (Lee, 2016; Murray et al., 2006). The model explains the fact that people who are expressed with love, acceptance and regarded with unconditional importance, develop a sense of security towards their partner, which helps them to engage in emotionally risky yet essential marital quality enhancing acts such as, sexual intimacy (Lee, 2016). Thus, people with low body image will lack the confidence to engage in sexually intimate experiences, which would consequently affect their marital satisfaction in a negative manner due to reduction in sexual esteem.

Related to the demographic factors, it was hypothesized that sociodemographic factors were likely to predict marital satisfaction. The outcomes of diverse statistical analyses revealed a significant disparity between men and women in terms of levels of sexual esteem and marital satisfaction. Men rather than women possess better levels of sexual esteem and marital satisfaction. There is a difference between the body image concerns level of

men and women but that difference is not that significant. Body image concerns are found to be higher in women then in men though the difference is not that large to be termed as significant.

Træen et al. (2016) explained the relationship between sociodemographic with body image, sexual intimacy and sexual satisfaction. Males reported rather positive body image, which in turn led to a better sexual satisfaction. Lower BMI was also associated with a better body image and increased sexual satisfaction. This is the reason why men have lower levels of body image concerns. Dobrowolska et al. (2020) conducted research in order to study a global perspective on marital satisfaction and its predictors. Study revealed that sex and its related domains were strong predictors of marital satisfaction. Thus, men are found to have better sexual esteem. They hold less appearance dissatisfaction and are known to be less preoccupied with reassurances that keeps them from hiding any defect that they might have. Thus, this increases the confidence in sexual experiences, which increases their sexual esteem as compared to women who are more preoccupied with reassurances due to their increased appearance dissatisfaction. Women tend to hide their defects which is the reason they are less likely to indulge in intimate activities with their partners leading to lower levels of sexual esteem, thus lower sexual and marital satisfaction (Lee, 2016; Murray et al., 2006; Peixoto et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The research outcomes revealed an adverse connection between body image concerns and marital satisfaction, irrespective of gender. In contrast, there was a positive correlation between sexual esteem and marital satisfaction. Additionally, body image concerns were negatively associated with sexual esteem. The study was grounded in the risk regulation theory proposed by Murray and Colleagues (2006). Distinct gender variations were observed in the levels of sexual esteem and

marital satisfaction among men and women. A robust financial background correlated with higher levels of sexual esteem and marital satisfaction. The relationship between body image concerns and marital satisfaction was found to be mediated by sexual esteem. Moreover, age and years of marriage did not emerge as significant predictors of marital satisfaction.

Limitations and Suggestions

The current study may have methodological limitations, as the tools utilized were developed within a Western cultural context. It is recommended to create indigenous tools that thoroughly assess the marital quality of individuals, incorporating local parameters. The findings of this study may have limited generalizability due to its cross-sectional nature. To delve into the underlying reasons for the decline in marital satisfaction with age, which couldn't be thoroughly examined in this study, further qualitative research is suggested.

Implications

The findings of this study may aid in developing therapeutic interventions designed to enhance marital satisfaction and address issues related to body image. This research could help in understanding the adverse effect of fashion industry and social media stigmatization of the idea of a "perfect shape for all" and help understand that all body shapes and appearances are acceptable unless concerning health. The study may have implications for pre-marital education initiatives that aim to provide couples with the information and skills they need to deal with obstacles in their marriages.

Contribution of Authors

Ahmad Naveed: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft
Afifa Anjum: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision

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