

Stress in Marital Disruption as a Function of Education Level in the Socioeconomic and Cultural Context of Bangladesh

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In the face of absence of any study concerning the relationship between stress in marital disruption and education in the local context, we hypothesized in the present study that there would be a positive relationship between stress in marital disruption and education level of the disrupted spouses. To investigate the relationship, a standardized test of measuring stress was developed and used to collect information from a total of 924 disrupted spouses of Bangladesh. The technique of sampling was purposive incidental. Three levels of education (Illiterate, Secondary Level, and Graduate) were considered in the present study. The results of the study suggest that the stress of graduate respondents was significantly higher than that of the respondents from secondary level and illiterate group. The results confirmed the hypothesis.

Keywords: Marital disruption, Death of one Spouse, Divorce, Separation, Desertion of one Spouse, Stress in Marital Disruption, Marital Disruption.

Stress is a complex pattern of cognitive appraisals, physiological responses, and behavioral tendencies that occur in response to a perceived imbalance between situational demands and our resources needed to cope with them. Stressors are specific kinds of eliciting stimuli or events that place strong demands on us that tax or exceed our resources. Three types of stressors as *micro-stressors* (the daily hassles and everyday annoyances we encounter at school, on the job, and in our family relations), *catastrophic events* (natural disasters, acts of war, and concentration camp confinement) and *major negative events* (being the victim of a major crime or sexual abuse, the death or loss of a loved one, the death of a family member, an academic or career failure, or a major illness of self or a beloved etc). All three classes of stressors require major adaptation and can have significant negative impacts on

psychological and physical well-being (Baum, Krantz & Gatchel, 1997). Events over which the person has little or no control, which occur suddenly and unpredictably, and which impact a person over a long period of time seem to take the greatest toll on physical and psychological well-being (Taylor, 1999). That is why marital disruption (death of one spouse, divorce, separation and desertion) is the most stressful event in a person's life. Divorced persons are exposed to more stressful life events, as the process of marital dissolution may be associated with the loss of one's social networks, financial problems, and legal difficulties. These stressors may persist for extensive periods of time (Menaghan & Lieberman, 1986). Studies show that divorced and separated people are more anxious, helpless, and have lower self-esteem than married people. They also are more frequently admitted to mental hospitals, have more

physical illnesses, and are more likely to commit suicide than married people. Divorce is a major cause of psychological and medical disorders (Bloom, Asher & White, 1978).

In marriage two individuals live in intimate association for the major portion of their lives. Each of these persons must have distinct personality, own history and experiences. The stability of a marital relation depends on the quality of relationship between the spouses, which is determined by their compatibility and the level of understanding. Persons who are competent in interpersonal relationships, educated, and well adjusted are capable of contributing to success in marriage. Education makes a person more understanding and more capable to handle any stressful situation in his favour. It gives spouses higher psychological maturity, which increases their capacity to maneuver the marriage situation in their favor or resolve marital conflicts. In the West, divorce rate serves as major indicators of marital discord. This is because divorce is not socially disapproved as strongly as it is done in our society. Educated people have a better position in the family and society. Thus marital tension is least perceptible socially in Bangladesh and is more subtly covered up here especially among the urban educated because of social prejudices against divorce or separation. Divorce is regarded as disgraceful among the affluent as well as traditional families. Divorce damages their as well as their family's prestige. That is why educated people are reluctant to divorce than illiterate ones. The educated people are also likely to be better nourished and biologically superior to the uneducated ones. They have a higher commitment to marriage as an institution, have more emotional attachment to their spouses, are more willing to cooperate, are more tolerant and respectful to spouses and view spouses as life partners. Educated people generally avoid divorce or separation,

as they are aware of the problems after marital disruption. Shahidullah (1979) found that most of the divorces in the rural areas in Bangladesh involve the landless or very poor farm laborers who have nothing to lose financially from divorce. In contrast, lowest divorce ratios were found among businessmen and servicemen who usually enjoy comparatively better economic opportunities (Shaikh, 1995) and who are usually educated. It is also likely that education can indeed help a person finding an occupation for making their living. Educated people have less friction stemming from money problems than illiterate ones as they are employed and have higher economic status. Thus, it is expected that the chances of divorce among educated people are lower than among the uneducated ones.

Majority of the population of Bangladesh are Muslims. Muslim marriage law allows (Hindu marriage law does not allow) divorce, which is responsible for marital disruption. According to Islamic law, a man can have up to four wives at a time. Islam recognizes polygamy but imposes certain conditions upon it, for example, the previous wife is entitled to Maintenance according to her status and in proportion to her husband's means, and the husband must treat all his wives equally. By the Hindu ideal of marriage, polygamy is allowed only when the first wife fails to give birth to a male child within the first few years of marriage. But illiterate men do not bother about the laws of religion. They marry and divorce, as they like.

In Bangladesh, polygamous marriages are believed to emanate from considerations of wealth, libido and luxury (Aziz, 1979). A man is never condemned by the society or religion for more than one marriage. His right to remarry is rather approved if he is capable to feed them all. This religious custom acts in favour of man to enter in polygamous marriage, which causes marital disruption. Polygamous marriages are less stable than

monogamous marriages. A polygamous man view wives more as bed partners than life-partners, is less tolerant and less responsibility conscious. Polygamous men with lower commitment to marriage as an institution can more easily disregard the stigma of divorce and remarriage. So to keep the marriage intact may be less important to him. This kind of view weakens the bonds of marriage. In addition, childless couples are stigmatized as unfortunate and this may have some bearing on the incidence of polygamous marriages. Infertility, particularly inability to give birth to a male child is main reasons of polygamy, which enhance the divorce risk. Polygamy and divorces are common in the rural areas of Bangladesh among the landless, illiterate, and very poor people as they have less emotional attachment to their spouses and they do not consider polygamy and divorce as disgraceful. So stress of marital disruption is lower in illiterate people than educated ones. Divorce is a male dominated affair in Bangladesh among illiterate people. Divorce and desertion is a matter of male whim, as he has no accountability to anybody. Society and religion do not condemn him for divorce or polygamy. This view encourages marital disruption by making the male less tolerant.

Economic problem is one of the main reasons of marital disruption among illiterate poor. Majority of the rural population of Bangladesh have little or no education and belong to low-income groups. Divorce occurs more frequently at the lower socioeconomic levels and in the lower working social classes. In these families, financial insecurity leads to unhappiness, dissatisfaction and marital instability. Men from low economic background keep pressing their spouses for dowry to meet the economic hardship that raises tension and unhappiness in marital relations. Moreover, these men poor grooms are less tolerant and respectful to their wives (and vice versa) as compared to persons from

higher economic background. Low income or poverty places a stress on marital relations.

Education has an effect on marriage stability and both husband and wife's education is related to the incidence of dissolution of marriage in Bangladesh. Uneducated people are more likely to divorce than educated people because they have not learned how to communicate effectively. Greater discrepancy in education may also lead to lack of understanding and unhappiness between spouses which is likely to increase the probability of divorce. The incidence of divorce declines as the level of education of the husband and wife increases.

Some of the investigators have found significant relationship between education and marital disruption. A study (Krystof Zeman, 2002) found that less educated people have a 27% higher risk of marriage disruption and university educated respondents a 37% lower risk. The incidence of divorce declines as the level of education of the husband and wife increases (Alam, Saha, & Van Ginneken, 2000). Inverse relationships of education with divorce have also been reported in other studies (White, 1990; Bhuiya, Chowdhury, Momen & Khatun, 1999).

It is expected that stress of marital disruption will be higher in educated people than less educated or illiterate ones. Bangladesh is a society with strong anti-divorce sentiment. Divorce is regarded here as an admission of failure and shameful thing. The social effect of marital disruption is the source of disrupted persons' stress, anxieties and embarrassments. Disrupted persons are looked down upon in the society; remarriage prospect is lower for them as they are not accepted warmly by the society. Widowed persons are stigmatized as unfortunate. The fear of subsequent weaker position in the

family, marriage and society causes higher stress in educated people.

They generally avoid divorce or separations and regard divorce and separation as disgraceful. So educated people are reluctant to divorce than illiterate or less educated people. From the above discussion, we hypothesized in the present study that there would be a positive relationship between stress in marital disruption and education of disrupted spouses.

Method

Sample:

The independent variable was the education level of the disrupted spouses and the amount of stress of the subjects was the dependent variable. Three levels of education (Illiterate, Secondary Level, and Graduate) were considered in the present study. To study the relationship, we administered a standardized test of measuring stress on 924 disrupted spouses (462 males and 462 females) of Bangladesh. The technique of sampling was purposive incidental.

Tool:

Initially 37 statements were made as the items of the test on the basis of three types of responses to stress after reviewing the available literature on stress. Then the statements were given to several experts to ascertain the suitability of the items for measuring stress. On the basis of the opinion of the judges, 36 items were selected for the scale. The judge's opinions towards the suitability of the items were considered as an indicator of face validity and content validity of the scale. The selected 36 items were presented in a Likert-format with 5 point continuum ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Brief instructions and space for demographic information of

respondents was also provided with the scale. Then the test was administered on 36 subjects. The reliability of the test was determined by employing test-retest ($r = .87$, $p < 0.01$, $p < .001$) and split-half ($r = .81$, $p < 0.01$, $p < .001$) form of reliability techniques, both were found highly significant. Finally factor analysis has been performed to justify the effectiveness of the test items measuring stress and all the items were found highly effective.

Procedure:

Each subject was approached individually. Educated subjects were asked to read instructions attentively and to give their opinions about each statement by giving a tick () mark on the number given below. The opinions of illiterate subjects were collected with the help of the researcher. The instruction was given in Bengali. The test contains 36 positive items and the sum of the item score was the total score of the subject.

Results

The results of ANOVA in table 1 indicate that the effect of education level was highly significant ($F = 638.974$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.001$). The mean scores, standard deviations, and the results of t-tests among the three levels of education of subjects have been presented in table 1. The table shows that the stress of graduate respondents is significantly higher than that of secondary level and illiterate respondents. The stress of secondary level respondents is also found to be significantly higher than that of illiterate respondents.

These results indicate that there is a positive relationship between stress and education level of the subjects.

Table 1: Results of the Comparison among Illiterate, Secondary level, and Graduate Groups on Stress Score.

| Education Level | N | Mean | SD | CV | t-value |
|-----------------|-----|---------|-------|------|----------|
| Graduate | 264 | 145.004 | 11.51 | 7.93 | 8.31*** |
| Secondary level | 396 | 137.465 | 11.27 | 8.20 | |
| Graduate | 264 | 145.004 | 11.51 | 7.93 | 14.91*** |
| Illiterate | 264 | 130.114 | 11.44 | 8.80 | |
| Secondary level | 396 | 137.465 | 11.27 | 8.20 | 4.89*** |
| Illiterate | 264 | 130.114 | 11.44 | 8.80 | |

*** $p < 0.001$

Discussion

Generally, it is observed that educated men have greater reluctance to divorce than illiterate ones because the stress of marital disruption is higher in educated population than in illiterate or less educated section. Personal, economic, religious, and social causes are responsible for this discrepancy. We hypothesized on the basis of this view that there will be a positive relationship between stress in marital disruption and education. The results of the study suggest that the stress of graduate spouses was significantly higher than that of respondents from secondary level and illiterate spouses. The stress of spouses from secondary level was also found to be significantly higher than that of illiterate spouses. These results confirm the hypothesis.

Studies show that education has an effect on marriage stability and both husband and wife's education is related to the incidence of marital disruption. Inverse relationships of education with divorce have been reported in different studies (White, 1990; Bhuiya, Chowdhury, Momen & Khatun, 1999; Krystof Zeman, 2002; Alam et al., 2000; Shaikh, 1995; Shahidullah, 1979). The results of these studies are also in accordance with the present research findings.

In conclusion it can be said that the present study is an attempt to analyze the relationship of stress in marital disruption with education. The researchers hope that a good number of investigators would find this area interesting, and meaningful for further studies.

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Note: The test of measuring stress may be obtained from the author.

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