

Relationship Satisfaction, Psychological Wellbeing and Empathy among Married Couples: A Correlational analysis with gender comparisons

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Adulthood brings with it a wide range of roles and responsibilities in various areas of life. Marriage is an important social and relational component in an adult's life, particularly in the Indian context. The objective of the study was to understand the association of psychological wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and empathy among married couples. Using purposive sampling data was collected from a sample of 60 married young adults, between ages 26 to 36 years old. The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire, Relationship Assessment Scale and Psychological Wellbeing Scale were used for data collection. A correlational research design revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.372$, $p < 0.003$) between psychological wellbeing and relationship satisfaction. However, correlation between psychological wellbeing and empathy was found to be very low positive correlation and statistically not significant. Significant gender differences were observed on empathy ($t = -2.797$, $df. 58$, $P < 0.007$) with females scoring higher in comparison to male participants. No significant gender differences were observed for relationship satisfaction and psychological wellbeing. The study highlights the significance of boosting psychological wellbeing through a sustained effort of need-based workshops focused to preserve and enhance healthy married relationships that form the core of societal institutions.

Keywords: Psychological Wellbeing, Relationship Satisfaction, Empathy, Gender

Relationship, according to the American Psychological Association, is a continuing and often committed association between two or more people, such as a family, friendship, marriage, partnership, or other interpersonal link in which the participants have some degree of influence on each other's thoughts, feelings, and actions. Marriage is a specific type of relationship. Marriage is the legalization of a couple's relationship. Marriage, on the other hand, is defined by psychology as a social institution. The quality of a marriage or relationship serves as a valuable resource for coping with stressful life circumstances, as well as contributing to partners' well-being and healthier lifestyle. "People mentally account for the benefits and costs of their relationships in order to assess whether the outcome is positive or negative." Relationship satisfaction was defined by Gerlach et al. (2018) as a person's overall assessment of their relationship. Gove, Hughes & Style (1983) signifies that it is the quality of a marriage rather than marriage itself that links marriage to positive

mental health. Research studies have revealed that many factors can influence relationship satisfaction among married couples. This study explores the possibility of an association between psychological wellbeing and empathy with relationship satisfaction.

Psychological well-being is defined as inter- and intraindividual levels of positive functioning that can include one's relatedness with others and self-referent attitudes that include one's sense of mastery and personal growth. Subjective well-being reflects affective judgments of life satisfaction. There are six dimensions of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life & Personal development (Ryff, 1989). A study using regression analysis found that marital relationship quality may predict a percentage of married men and women's psychological well-being (Khajeha, Goodarzi & Soliemani, 2014). Another study that focused on finding neural

correlates of marital satisfaction using fMRI on heterosexual couple bonds (Acevedo, Aron, Fisher, Brown, 2012) highlight key neural sites that may mediate the relationship quality-psychological and physical well-being-health link. Kim & Mc Kenry (2002) did a longitudinal analysis on the relationship between marriage and psychological well-being and the results explain the reciprocal influence of marriage on one's well-being and psychological well-being on marriage. Gómez-López, Viejo & Ortega-Ruiz (2019) aimed a systematic review on well-being and romantic relationships in adolescence and emerging adulthood. They demonstrated that romantic relationships can be an important source of well-being for both adolescents and emerging adults.

Empathy is the “psychological ‘superglue’ that connects people and underpins cooperation and kindness” (The Economist, June 7, 2019). Even if empathy does not come naturally, research indicates that it is possible to cultivate it—and, hopefully, improve society as a result. “Scholars have demonstrated across domains that empathy motivates many types of prosocial behaviors, such as forgiveness, volunteering, and helping, and that it is negatively associated with aggression and bullying.” Cohen, Schulz, Weiss & Waldinger (2012) explored individual and dyadic contributions of empathic accuracy and perceived empathic effort to relationship satisfaction. The findings suggest that a partner's perception of empathic effort – as opposed to empathic accuracy – is uniquely informative in understanding how partners may derive relationship satisfaction from empathic processes. The study proposed that when working with couples in treatment, increasing partners' perceptions of each other's empathic effort and teaching partners how to demonstrate effort may represent particularly powerful opportunities for improving relationship satisfaction. Another study by Cramer & Jowett (2010) aimed to study perceived empathy, accurate empathy and relationship satisfaction in heterosexual couples using dyadic analysis. Empathy was found to be positively related to relationship satisfaction and negatively related

to depression and conflict. Leesa, Niekerk, Schubert & Matthewson (2020) aimed to study emotional intimacy, empathic concern, and relationship satisfaction in sixty couples and found that partner empathic concern was linked to both their own and the woman's relationship satisfaction.

Associations are also identified through research (Khajeha, Baharloo & Soliemani, 2014) between psychological well-being and empathy quotient in 200 married students, in the Iranian city of Najafabad wherein a positive and meaningful relationship between EQ and psychological well-being using the stepwise regression technique is established. Vinayak & Judge (2018) aimed to study Resilience and Empathy as predictors of psychological well-being among adolescents. Empathy was discovered to be related to psychological well-being and empathy was retained as predictor of psychological well-being in girls. Girls were discovered to be more compassionate and resilient than boys. There were no gender differences in psychological well-being.

Marital satisfaction is cornerstone of marriage as a social institution. In the era of severe blows to the roots of a stable marital relationship, it is imperative to consider worth researching on concepts that would help to maintain married healthy relationships. This study is an endeavor in this direction.

Aim

- To identify relationship between relationship satisfaction, empathy and psychological wellbeing among married couples.
- To examine empathy and psychological wellbeing as predictors of relationship satisfaction among married couples.
- To assess gender differences on psychological wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and empathy.

Hypotheses

- There exists a significant positive

correlation between relationship satisfaction, empathy and psychological wellbeing among married couples.

- Empathy and psychological wellbeing will be significant predictors of relationship satisfaction among married couples.
- No significant gender differences will exist on psychological wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and empathy.

Variables and Operational definitions:

- Psychological Well-being: defined as scores obtained on Psychological Wellbeing Scale.
- Relationship Satisfaction: measured as scores obtained on the Relationship Assessment Scale.
- Empathy: measured as scores obtained on The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire.
- Gender: refers to the psychological, behavioral, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female (i.e., masculinity or femininity).

Method

Sample

60 participants were selected using purposive sampling, 30 married males and 30 married females, age range 26 – 36 years, married for a minimum of 3 years and maximum of 6 years, not in the process of divorce or separation and know to read and understand English language.

Data Collection Tools

Psychological Wellbeing Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995): measures six aspects of wellbeing. Respondents rate how strongly they agree or disagree with 18 statements using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly agree; 7 = strongly disagree). Higher scores mean higher levels of psychological well-being. The test-retest reliability coefficient was 0.82. The correlation coefficient of RPWBS with Satisfaction with Life, Happiness, and Self-esteem was also found to be: 0.47, 0.58, and 0.46 respectively.

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) Dicke and Hendrick (1988): is a brief measure of global relationship satisfaction. It consists of

seven items, each rated on a five-point Likert scale. The higher the score, the more satisfied the respondent is with his/her relationship. Cronbach alpha was found to be 0.86. There was a significant positive correlation between Relationship Assessment Scale and Dyadic Adjustment Scale ($r = 0.80$).

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) by Spreng et al. (2009): measures empathy. It is a self-report scale that consists of 16 items to which participants have to respond on 5-point measure ranging from Never to Always. The items represent a wide variety of empathy-related behaviors. The TEQ's internal consistency coefficient is 0.85. TEQ demonstrated high test-retest reliability, $r = .81$.

Design

The study uses the survey method with a Correlational and comparative analysis.

Procedure

A Google form was used to collect data from participants. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp were utilized to share the Google form. The participants were assured utmost confidentiality and provided with email id to get their doubts clarified before, during, or after they responded to the Google form. After they filled the questionnaire, they were debriefed and thanked for participating in the research.

Statistical Analysis

The descriptive statistics of Mean, SD, SE along with Pearson's correlation coefficient, regression analysis and t test will be used to obtain results. SPSS V.26 is used.

Ethical Consideration:

- Informed consent was taken from the participants.
- Confidentiality of the participant details was maintained.
- Participants were debriefed about the results and study.
- Participants were allowed to leave the study in between if they feel uncomfortable without any penalty.

Results

The current study examined the relationship between psychological wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and empathy among married couples. In addition, the study purports to examine psychological wellbeing and empathy as significant predictors of relationship satisfaction along with assessing gender comparisons on the selected study variables.

Descriptive Statistics on Psychological Wellbeing, Relationship Satisfaction and Empathy.

Table 01: Descriptive Statistics on psychological wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and empathy.

Variables of the study	N	Mean	SD
Psychological Wellbeing	60	95.5333	10.4563
Relationship Satisfaction	60	29.3333	3.62041
Empathy	60	46.8333	6.72755

The Mean score of psychological wellbeing is 95.5333 with SD of 10.4563; for relationship satisfaction is 29.3333 with SD of 3.62041 and for empathy is 46.8333 with SD is 6.72755.

Correlation between Psychological Wellbeing, Relationship Satisfaction and Empathy.

Table 02: Pearson's Correlation coefficient between psychological wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and empathy.

Variables of the study		
Psychological wellbeing & relationship satisfaction	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.372 0.003**
Empathy & Psychological wellbeing	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.233 0.073
Empathy & relationship satisfaction	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.078 0.553

** significant at 0.01 level of significance.

As observed in the table 02 above, there is a positive significant correlation ($r = .372$, $p < .05$) between psychological wellbeing and

relationship satisfaction in married couples. Similarly, there is a positive correlation between empathy with psychological wellbeing ($r = .233$, $p > .05$) and empathy with relationship satisfaction ($r = .078$, $p > .05$) among married couples, but the relationship between these variables is not significant. This shows that an increase in psychological wellbeing will increase relationship satisfaction.

Since there is no significant relationship between relationship satisfaction and empathy, regression analysis could not be conducted to identify empathy as a significant contributor to relationship satisfaction.

Gender Comparisons on Study Variables:

Table 03 indicates the Mean, SD and t test value on the study variables of psychological wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and empathy.

There were no significant gender differences on psychological wellbeing scores ($t = 1.193$, $df = 58$, $p = 0.238$) ($p > 0.05$), although the Mean score for males ($M = 97.133$, $SD = 9.90$) was higher as compared to females ($M = 93.933$, $SD = 10.84668$). The magnitude of the differences in the mean (mean difference = 3.200, 95% CI: -2.16917 to 8.56917) was not big enough to show a significant difference.

Similarly, there were no significant gender differences on relationship satisfaction scores ($t = 1.514$, $df = 58$, $p = 0.135$) ($p > 0.05$), although the Mean scores for males ($M = 30.03$, $SD = 3.56$) was higher as compared to females ($M = 28.63$, $SD = 3.59$). The magnitude of the differences in the mean (mean difference = 1.40, 95% CI: -.45102 to 3.25102) was insignificant.

However, it is interesting to note that there was a significant difference on empathy scores ($t = -2.797$, $df = 58$, $p = .007$) ($p < 0.01$) with females ($M = 49.13$, $SD = 5.79$) indicating a Mean score significantly higher than males ($M = 44.53$, $SD = 1.25$). The magnitude of the differences in the Mean (mean difference = -4.6000, 95% CI: -7.89191 to -1.30809) was significant. Hence, females are observed to be more empathetic as compared to males.

Table 03: Descriptive Statistics of gender comparisons (male/female) on psychological wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and empathy and t test values for significance.

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t test
Psychological wellbeing	Male	30	97.13	9.90	t = 1.193, df. 58 Sig. (2 tailed): 0.238
	Female	30	93.93	10.84	
Relationship satisfaction	Male	30	30.03	3.56	t = 1.514, df. 58 Sig. (2 tailed): 0.135
	Female	30	28.63	3.59	
Empathy	Male	30	44.53	6.89	t = -2.797, df. 58 Sig. (2 tailed): 0.007**
	Female	30	49.13	5.79	

** significant at 0.01 level of significance.

Discussion

Psychological wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and empathy was observed to express a positive correlation with each other. This indicates that higher scores on one are accompanied by higher scores on the other. However, positive relationship was found statistically significant only between the variables of psychological wellbeing and relationship satisfaction. Similar results were found by Falconier, Bodenmann, Schneider & Bradbury (2014) who state that consistent with systemic-transactional stress model (STM) predictions, path model analysis results show that for actor effects, extra-dyadic stress from daily hassles is directly related to lower psychological wellbeing and only indirectly to lower relationship satisfaction through increased intra-dyadic stress.

A gendered comparison on variables of psychological wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and empathy revealed no statistically significant differences on levels of psychological wellbeing and relationship satisfaction. However, statistically significant difference was found on levels of empathy with female participants indicating higher levels of empathy as compared to male participants of the study. A study conducted by Salleh & Mustafa (2016) reported no significant differences between males and females on psychological wellbeing. Similarly, a Meta-analysis done to test the belief that women have lower marital satisfaction than men revealed no gender differences in marital satisfaction. The present study may attribute the significant differences on empathy to socialization practices in Indian cultures, where females are known to be more emotionally sensitive and other oriented as compared to males. Whereas, no

gender differences on psychological wellbeing and relationship satisfaction reveals that gender is not an important factor but other factors like personality traits, self-esteem, stress dyads and socio-demographic factors may reveal significant differences on the study variables.

Limitations

Current research has following limitations: Since the study was conducted on a small sample, there are limits on generalization. Data was collected using Google Forms raising doubts on the respondents' honesty, full engagement and possibility of altered/ false responses to appear socially desirable.

It is necessary to conduct longitudinal studies to achieve greater clarity and understanding of relationships among study variables. Cultural differences may have affected the findings. Effect of heterogeneity of the participants may also have affected the results of the study.

Implications of the study:

This study has revealed significant relationship between psychological wellbeing and relationship satisfaction. A spouse who scores high on psychological wellbeing will enjoy happiness in his/ her relationship. Conducting need-based workshops, Couple counselling, and talks on relationship management can help to strengthen relationships and move towards sustainable families.

Future scope for research:

Studies may be conducted using larger sample size to increase the validity of the research and also selecting more homogeneous sample may help in increasing internal and external validity of the research. Future research

may focus on the effect of socio-demographic variables on the selected study variables. Using a Qualitative study method may help to establish a deeper relationship among study variables. The study can also be conducted on people who are in live-in relationship or are committed in their relationship.

Conclusion

The purpose of the current research was to understand the association between psychological wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and empathy in married couples. The results revealed that there was a significant positive correlation between psychological wellbeing and relationship satisfaction. The correlation was positive but not statistically significant for psychological wellbeing and empathy and for relationship satisfaction and empathy. Gender differences were observed on Mean scores of psychological wellbeing, relationship satisfaction and empathy between males and females. However, the gender difference was found significant only on empathy. Females scored higher on empathy as compared to males.

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