Marital Adjustment and Its Relationship with Stress, Mental Health, Expectation, and Body Image

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates marital adjustment and its association with stress, mental health, expectations, and body image among married and unmarried individuals from rural and urban areas of Pune and Nashik. The sample included 40 married couples (80 individuals) and 40 unmarried males and females. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-test, ANOVA, F-test, correlation, and multiple regression. Results indicate that stress negatively correlates with marital adjustment, while mental health and expectations positively influence it. Body image also shows a moderate positive relationship with marital adjustment.

Keywords: Marital Adjustment, Stress, Mental Health, Expectation, Body Image

INTRODUCTION

Marital adjustment is a critical component of relationship satisfaction, emotional well-being, and overall family stability. It reflects the extent to which partners understand, communicate, support, and adapt to each other's needs and expectations. High levels of marital adjustment are associated with improved mental health, greater life satisfaction, and stronger family cohesion, whereas poor adjustment can lead to stress, conflict, and even marital dissolution (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Research indicates that psychosocial factors play a crucial role in shaping marital adjustment. For example, Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2000) emphasized that communication patterns, emotional support, and problem-solving skills are significant predictors of marital satisfaction. Similarly, Conger et al. (2000) found that early family experiences and socialization influence individuals' competence in adult romantic relationships, affecting both adjustment and stability. Moreover, studies have highlighted the influence of personal variables such as mental health and body image on relationship outcomes. Sprecher and Felmlee (1992) reported that individuals with a positive body image experience higher relational satisfaction, while Whisman, Dixon, and Johnson (1997) demonstrated that poor mental health and psychological distress negatively affect marital adjustment.

Stress and expectations also exert significant influence on marital adjustment. Couples experiencing high levels of stress or having unrealistic expectations often report lower satisfaction and adjustment (Neff & Karney, 2005; Karney & Bradbury, 2007). Conversely, partners with positive expectations and effective coping strategies are more likely to maintain stable and satisfying relationships. In addition, cultural and contextual factors, including urban versus rural living environments, may moderate these associations, highlighting the need for research across diverse populations. Understanding these interrelated factors is essential for developing effective interventions, counseling strategies, and programs aimed at enhancing marital harmony and promoting long-term relationship stability.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Marital adjustment has long been recognized as a crucial factor influencing relationship satisfaction and stability. Amato and Rogers (1997) highlighted that marital problems could predict subsequent divorce, emphasizing the importance of understanding the dynamics of marital relationships. Similarly, Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach

(2000) conducted a longitudinal review of determinants of marital satisfaction and reported that communication quality, emotional support, and shared problem-solving are significant predictors of marital adjustment. Conger, Cui, Bryant, and Elder (2000) further noted that family influences during early adulthood play a pivotal role in shaping competence in romantic relationships, affecting both adjustment and long-term stability. Tools like the Enrich Marital Inventory have been validated across cultures for assessing marital quality (Fowers & Olson, 1993), and Gottman and Levenson (2000) demonstrated that specific interaction patterns can predict the timing of divorce over extended periods.

Research also underscores the impact of psychosocial factors on marital satisfaction. Karney and Bradbury (1995) emphasized that both personal and contextual factors contribute to the longitudinal course of marital quality. Newlywed couples' adjustment levels can serve as reliable predictors of marital dissolution (Kurdek, 1998). Neff and Karney (2005) reported that the degree of adoration and accuracy in perceiving one's partner significantly influences marital satisfaction. Shifts in gender role attitudes also affect marital quality over time (Rogers & Amato, 2000), and dyadic adjustment scales remain a reliable metric for evaluating relationship quality (Spanier, 1976). Sprecher and Felmlee (1992) highlighted the role of body image in shaping relationship satisfaction, while Whisman, Dixon, and Johnson (1997) showed that interspousal psychological distress correlates with lower marital adjustment.

Recent studies reinforce these findings and expand upon contextual and developmental factors. Fincham and Beach (2010) reviewed marital quality research in the new millennium, demonstrating evolving patterns in adjustment and satisfaction. Karney and Bradbury (2005) noted that contextual factors such as socioeconomic status, stress, and life events significantly influence marital outcomes. Religion and shared belief systems have also been associated with marital stability and adjustment (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). Preventive interventions, including counseling and skill-building programs, can enhance marital satisfaction and reduce divorce risk (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2010). Longitudinal evidence suggests a U-shaped pattern of marital happiness, where satisfaction dips in midlife and rises later (Rauer, Karney, Garvan, & Hou, 2008), and marital quality is closely linked to physical and mental health over the life course (Umberson, Williams, Powers, Liu, & Needham, 2006). Parenthood may decrease marital satisfaction, particularly when expectations are unmet (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). Finally, stress and coping mechanisms are central to understanding relationship satisfaction and adjustment, highlighting the complex interplay of psychological, social, and personal factors in determining marital outcomes (Karney & Bradbury, 2007).

Objectives

1. To study the relationship between marital adjustment and stress, mental health, expectations, and body image.

2. To compare marital adjustment between married and unmarried individuals.

3. To examine rural and urban differences in marital adjustment.

4. To identify predictors of marital adjustment among the variables.

Hypotheses

H1: Married individuals will report higher marital adjustment than unmarried individuals.

H2: Stress will negatively correlate with marital adjustment.

H3: Mental health will positively correlate with marital adjustment.

H4: Expectations and body image will positively correlate with marital adjustment.

H5: There will be differences in marital adjustment between rural and urban participants.

METHODOLOGY

Sample: 120 participants (40 married couples and 40 unmarried individuals) were selected from Pune and Nashik, covering both rural and urban areas.

Summary Table

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Variables (N = 120)

Group	Urban	Rural	Total
Married participants	40	40	80
Unmarried participants	20	20	40
Total	60	60	120

Variables: **Independent variables** - Stress, mental health, expectation, body image; **Dependent variable** - Marital adjustment.

Tools: Standardized questionnaires for marital adjustment, stress, mental health, expectations, and body image were used.

Statistical Analysis: Mean, median, standard deviation, correlation, t-test, ANOVA, F-test, and multiple regression.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of the study variables are presented in Table 1. Married participants reported higher mean scores on marital adjustment (M = 72.5, SD = 10.2) compared to unmarried participants. Stress showed a moderate negative mean score (M = 54.1, SD = 9.8), while mental health, expectations, and body image had moderate-to-high positive mean scores.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Variables

Variable	Mean	Median	SD	N
Marital Adjustment	72.5	73.0	10.2	120
Stress	54.1	55.0	9.8	120
Mental Health	68.4	69.0	8.7	120
Expectation	61.2	62.0	7.9	120
Body Image	58.7	59	6.8	120

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis (Table 2) revealed that stress is negatively correlated with marital adjustment ($r = -0.45$, $p < 0.01$), while mental health ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), expectations ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$), and body image ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$) showed positive associations.

Variable	Marital Adj	Stress	Mental Health	Expectation	Body Image
Marital Adjustment	-	-0.45**	0.52**	0.31*	0.27*
Stress	-0.45**	-	-0.40**	-0.20*	-0.18*
Mental Health	0.52**	-0.40**	-	0.25*	0.21*
Expectation	0.31*	-0.20*	0.25*	-	0.19*
Body Image	0.27*	-0.18*	0.21*	0.19*	-

Independent Samples t-Test:

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare married and unmarried participants on marital adjustment. The t-test assesses whether the difference in means between two independent groups is statistically significant. In this study, the married group reported significantly higher marital adjustment than the unmarried group ($t = 3.25$, $p < 0.01$).

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA):

A one-way ANOVA was used to examine differences in marital adjustment between participants from urban and rural areas. ANOVA tests whether there are significant differences among group means. Results indicated a significant urban-rural difference ($F = 4.12$, $p < 0.05$), with urban participants exhibiting slightly higher adjustment.

Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict marital adjustment from stress, mental health, expectations, and body image. The model was significant ($F = 15.42$, $p < 0.001$) and explained 42% of the variance in marital adjustment ($R^2 = 0.42$). Stress was a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -0.38$, $p < 0.01$), while mental health ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), expectations ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$), and body image ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$) were positive predictors.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between marital adjustment and psychosocial variables including stress, mental health, expectations, and body image among married and unmarried individuals from urban and rural areas of Pune and Nashik. The results indicate that stress negatively correlates with marital adjustment, while mental health, expectations, and body image positively influence it.

Stress and Marital Adjustment: Consistent with previous research (Karney & Bradbury, 2007; Neff & Karney, 2005), higher levels of stress were associated with lower marital adjustment. Chronic stress can reduce emotional availability, impair communication, and heighten conflicts between partners, thereby undermining relationship quality. Stress management interventions, such as counseling or mindfulness-based programs, may therefore improve marital adjustment.

Mental Health and Expectations: Mental health emerged as a strong positive predictor of marital adjustment, supporting findings by Whisman et al. (1997) and Conger et al. (2000). Individuals with better mental health are more likely to engage in effective problem-solving, emotional regulation, and supportive behaviors, which enhance relationship satisfaction. Similarly, having realistic expectations about marital roles and responsibilities fosters mutual understanding and reduces conflict, consistent with the findings of Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2000).

Body Image and Relationship Satisfaction: Body image also showed a moderate positive correlation with marital adjustment. This aligns with studies by Sprecher and Felmlee (1992), who found that individuals with a positive body image report higher relational satisfaction. Positive body image may enhance self-esteem, attractiveness perception, and confidence in interpersonal interactions, contributing to better adjustment.

Married vs Unmarried & Urban vs Rural Differences: Married participants reported higher marital adjustment compared to unmarried participants, reflecting the experience and adaptation developed over the course of marriage. Urban participants exhibited slightly higher adjustment than rural participants, potentially due to greater access to counseling, social support, and awareness regarding mental health and relationship skills. These findings are in line with Karney & Bradbury's (2005) observation that contextual factors such as socioeconomic environment and living conditions influence marital quality.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the multifaceted nature of marital adjustment and its significant relationship with stress, mental health, personal expectations, and body image. Findings indicate that higher stress levels are associated with lower marital adjustment, whereas better mental health, positive expectations, and a favorable body image contribute to higher adjustment levels. Married individuals demonstrate greater marital adjustment compared to unmarried participants, and urban participants show slightly higher adjustment than their rural counterparts.

These results underscore the importance of addressing psychosocial and personal factors to enhance marital satisfaction and stability. Interventions focusing on stress management, mental health support, realistic expectation setting, and promoting a positive body image may effectively improve marital adjustment. The study contributes to the understanding of relationship dynamics in both rural and urban contexts and offers practical implications for psychologists, counselors, and family welfare programs aiming to foster healthy and satisfying marital relationships.

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