

ATTACHMENT STYLES AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG WOMEN IN MONOGAMOUS AND POLYGAMOUS MARRIAGES: EVIDENCE FROM PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Marital satisfaction is well known as a key measure of quality of relationships and psychological health. Adult attachment theory suggests that the attachment orientations of the individuals determine emotional intimacy, communication and relationship satisfaction. Despite the wealth of evidence on attachment and marital behavior in monogamous unions, relatively few studies have explored these relationships in polygamous marriages, especially in South Asian cultures where cultural customs and religious values are likely to influence marriage behavior. The current research examined the variation in attachment styles and marital satisfaction of women in monogamous and polygamous marriages in Pakistan. The cross-sectional design was mixed and purposive sampling was used. The sample size was 200 women who were married and lived in Pakistan and half of them were monogamous and the other half polygamous marriages. The Urdu version of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) was used to measure adult attachment, and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) was used to measure marital satisfaction. The results of relationship outcomes between the two groups were compared using independent-samples t-tests and correlation analyses with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics Version 28. The results showed that women who were married in monogamous marriages were much more contented with their marriages and more intimate than women in polygamous marriages. On the other hand, polygamous wives exhibited a much greater attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. These results indicate that insecure attachment orientations relate to worse relationship outcomes in polygamous marital situations. The research is important to the scanty literature on marital relationships in Pakistan because it demonstrates the psychological mechanisms of marital satisfaction in various marital structures. The results highlight the relevance of attachment-based interventions and culturally sensitive marriage counseling to enhance the quality of relationships of married women.

I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is among the most basic social institutions and the basis of emotional support, companionship, family formation and psychological well-being. Marriage has biological, social, psychological and economic roles across cultures and gives people a chance to be intimate, to support each other as well as to develop personally (Canel, 2012; Ersanlili & Kalkan 2008). Despite the universality of marriage, the meaning and expectation of marriage differ significantly in different societies because of cultural practices, religious doctrines and family structures (Ozgugen, 2001). Marriage in collectivist countries like Pakistan is a blend of two families as well as two people and therefore the quality of relationships is highly conditioned by the social and family demands (Sonpar, 2005; Stange et al., 2011). Marital satisfaction is considered to be one of the best predictors of the quality of relationships and psychological wellness. According to Hawkins (1968) marital satisfaction was described as the subjective experiences of happiness, satisfaction and pleasure in assessing marriage. Subsequently, researchers focused more on the fact that marital satisfaction involves the degree to which spouses feel that their emotional, relational, and personal expectations are met in marriage (Al-Darmaki et al., 2016). Better mental health, greater emotional intimacy, good communication, and healthy family functioning have always been linked with high marital satisfaction and depression, anxiety, interpersonal conflict and high risk of marital dissolution have always been tied to marital dissatisfaction (Hall, 2006; Stutzer & Frey, 2006). As such, determining the psychological predictors of marital satisfaction is still a significant goal in relationship and family psychology.

Attachment theory has been one of the most influential theoretical approaches to the explanations of relationship functioning. Firstly, introduced by Bowlby (1969), the attachment theory proposes that the earliest interactions with caregivers form internal working models that affect emotional regulation, interpersonal trust, expectations in close relationships later in life. The attachment theory was also applied to adult romantic relationships, Hazan and Shaver (1987) proposed that romantic partners as attachment figures offer emotional security and support. These models of working with the internal world affect the way of how people can feel intimacy, react on conflict, seek emotional support and can sustain lasting romantic relationships (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The conceptualizations of adult attachment are usually based on two continuous dimensions, which include affective anxiety toward attachment and avoidance of attachment (Brennan et al., 1998). High levels of attachment anxiety individuals are prone to fear of abandonment, excessive reassurance, and are very sensitive to rejection. On the other hand, people who are high in attachment avoidance suppress emotional needs, stay out of intimacy and keep emotional distance between them and the partner (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). Low anxiety and avoidance levels are described as secure attachment, which enables trust, emotional attachment, positive communication and effective resolution of conflicts, thus leading to increased marital satisfaction (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Many empirical studies have established that secure attachment leads to healthier relationship functioning and insecure attachment leads to increased conflict, emotional distress and less relationship satisfaction (Fraley and Shaver, 2000).

The connection between attachment styles and marital satisfaction has been well studied in monogamous marriages, however, very little has been done to establish the relationships in polygamous marriages. The majority of current psychological studies have been carried out in the Western world where monogamy is the main type of marriage (Tsapelas, Fisher, & Aron, 2010). As such, not much is known about attachment processes in culturally different family systems where other marital arrangements still prevail. Polygyny, the union of a man with more than one wife, is still legal in Pakistan subject to certain conditions that have been developed by the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (1961). The existing literature indicates that women in polygamous marriages suffer more psychologically than women in monogamous marriages. High rates of depression, anxiety, jealousy, loneliness, decreased self-esteem, family discord and emotional distress have been commonly reported among women living in polygamous families (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 1999; Al-Krenawi, 2001). The role of financial strain, unequal resource allocation and competition among co-wives also add to psychological problems and low relationship satisfaction (Agadjanian & Ezech, 2000; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001, 2001c). Such experiences can have negative influences on emotional security and lead to the formation of insecure attachment styles, which eventually leads to decreased marital satisfaction. In Pakistan, marital relationship is also affected by ingrained cultural norms on gender roles, family honor, obedience, and marital stability. Women usually receive socialization that values

caregiving and family unity and withstands of marriage over personal emotional desires (Capstick, 2016). As a result, the psychological experiences that are involved in marriage cannot be well comprehended without a wider sociocultural context in which intimate relationships are encompassed (Sonpar, 2005).

The attachment theory is useful in explaining these experiences since attachment security is determined by the perceived attachment figures availability, responsiveness and consistency (Bowlby, 1969). In polygamous families, emotional and material resources are often shared between more than two spouses and children, which may lead to the creation of ambiguity with emotional attentiveness and perceived spousal responsiveness. This can further contribute to attachment anxiety, emotional insecurity, and dissatisfaction with the relationships (Shepard, 2013). Although more research is being done on the topic of family relationships among various cultures, there is a lack of empirical research on comparative studies of attachment styles and marital satisfaction among monogamous and polygamous women in Pakistan. The existing literature has been more concerned with legal, religious, demographic or sociological aspects of polygamy and relatively few studies have been done in the relationship between the quality of relationships and the psychological mechanisms. In addition, there is limited research that has directly compared attachment anxiety, avoidance of attachment and marital satisfaction among women in monogamous and polygamous marriages based on standardized psychological assessments in the Pakistani setting. The current research attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the variations in the attachment styles and marital satisfaction in women who are in monogamous and polygamous marriages in Pakistan. In particular, the researcher compares attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and marital satisfaction between the two groups through the validated psychological measures. The study incorporates both the attachment theory and relationship studies in a collectivist cultural context, which provides a contribution to the accumulating body of literature on the topic of adult attachment and offers culturally relevant information to the relationship counseling, family therapy, and mental health practice. The implications of the results of this study are significant to clinicians, marriage counselors, psychologists, and policymakers who strive to enhance the well-being of marriages and mental health of women in Pakistan. The insights about the role of attachment orientations in marital satisfaction in various marital structures can be used to develop culturally sensitive interventions based on attachment to enhance emotional communication, quality of relationships, and psychological well-being of married women.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Attachment Theory and Adult Romantic Relationships

Attachment theory is a theory that was initially postulated by Bowlby (1969), and it is based on the idea that the early life experience with the caregivers would determine the internal working models of the individuals, which would in turn affect the emotional regulation, interpersonal trust, and expectations in future relationships. Applying this theory to the adult phase, Hazan and Shaver (1987) suggested that romantic partners also play the role of attachment figures, who offer emotional security, comfort and support. Attachment theory has since emerged as one of the most powerful theories of understanding intimate relationships in adults. The conceptualization of adult attachment is usually done on two dimensions, i.e. attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998). Highly-attached anxiety individuals are fearful of being abandoned, love to be over reassured, and are emotionally dependent on their partners. Conversely, people who are highly avoided in attachment tend to repress emotional needs, shun intimacy, and keep interpersonal distances. Individuals who are securely attached, having low levels of anxiety and low levels of avoidance tend to have more emotional closeness, trust and relationship stability (Fraley and Shaver, 2000). These are the concepts that create the theoretical foundation of the marital functioning in both monogamous and polygamous relationships.

Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction is a personal assessment of marriage quality and success. According to Hawkins (1968), marital satisfaction described the subjective feelings of joy, pleasure and fulfillment one feels in marriage. Subsequent research focused on the fact that marital satisfaction involves emotional intimacy, communication, mutual respect, trust, companionship, and satisfaction of marital expectations (Al-Darmaki et al., 2016). There has always been positive correlation between high marital satisfaction and superior psychological well-being, reduced depression and anxiety, better physical health and healthier family functioning. Low marital satisfaction on the other hand is

linked to emotional distress, interpersonal conflict and higher tendency towards marital instability (Stutzer and Frey, 2006). Past studies have demonstrated that the quality of communication, emotional support, conflict resolution, socioeconomic circumstances, and attachment security are some of the best predictors of marital satisfaction (Hall, 2006; Berscheid and Regan, 2005).

Attachment Styles and Marital Satisfaction

There also exists a significant literature that proves that attachment styles are a significant predictor of relationships quality. There is a positive relationship between secure attachment and emotional intimacy, constructive conflict resolution, relationship commitment, and marital satisfaction (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Individuals who are attached securely tend to view their partners as emotionally accessible and trustworthy and are more likely to achieve intimacy and stability in their relationships in the long term. Conversely, attachment anxiety tends to be linked with fear of rejection, jealousy, emotional dependency, and hypervigilance to threats in relationships as compared to attachment avoidance that is linked with emotional withdrawal, discomfort with intimacy, and decreased relationship satisfaction (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). As a result, low marital satisfaction and worse psychological adjustment in various populations have been consistently related to insecure attachment patterns.

Monogamous and Polygamous Marriages

There are significant variations in marriage structures between cultures. Monogamy has been the most common type of marriage in the world with polygyny where a man marries more than one wife still in existence in most of the societies found in Africa, Middle East, and South Asia (Tsapelas, Fisher, & Aron, 2010). Pakistan Pakistani law legalizes polygyny under the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (1961), but only under the condition that certain legal conditions regarding fairness, consent and so on are met. Polygyny is authorized by religious doctrine under specified conditions, but most often cultural practices dictate its application. The socioeconomic status, infertility, inheritance issues, family customs, and social demands usually play a role in dictating the decision on successive marriages. As a result, the lives of women in polygamous marriages differ significantly based on cultural practices, family structures, and wealth.

Psychological Well-being of Women in Polygamous Marriages

The studies have shown that women in polygamous marriages are always psychologically distressed compared to women in monogamous marriages. Al-Krenawi and Graham (1999) found out that there were increased rates of depression, anxiety, loneliness and low self-esteem among women living in polygamous families. Likewise, Al-Krenawi (2001) discovered that women in polygamous families had worse family functioning and life satisfaction. The lack of financial means, inequity in the allocation of family resources, and employment are other contributing factors to psychological distress in women in polygamous marriages (Agadjanian and Ezeh, 2000). The societal injustices and limited chances of accessing resources tend to deny women the right to speak out (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001). The rank of wives has as well been linked to psychological effects. Older wives often complain of rejection, loss of self-esteem and emotional rejection by their spouses after the latter remarried, but younger wives can feel stigmatized by the society and struggle to get along with their husbands (Elbedour et al., 2002; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 1999). Research has also reported high cases of somatization, hostility, paranoia and psychological distress in women in polygamous families (Al-Krenawi, 2001).

Attachment Processes in Polygamous Marriages

Despite the fact that empirical studies on attachment in the context of polygamous families are scarce, the attachment theory can be used as a valuable guide to emotional functioning in the latter family set-ups. Bowlby (1969) developed a theory about the stability of availability and responsiveness of attachment figures, which is the determinant of attachment security. In polygamous families, emotional resources have a tendency to be shared between two or more spouses, which may add to the confusion on emotional support. Recent research indicates that mindfulness-based programs have been evidenced to alleviate attachment anxiety and avoidance through enhancing emotional control (Gazder et al., 2025). Attachments also seem to be affected by cultural background. On the one hand, ghasemieshkaftaki et al. (2025) suggested that sociocultural norms along with interpersonal contacts influence attachment security. Similarly, Sereikaitė (2025) established that positive cultural discourse about polygyny facilitated positive relationships between co-wives, but Shepard, (2013) established that social

stigma about polygamy led to attachment insecurity and emotional distress. The legal restrictions and institutional barriers have also been associated with attachment anxiety in women in polygamous families.

Marital Satisfaction within the Pakistani Context

In Pakistan marriage is entrenched within the collectivist family systems where the relations are not confined to the couple but also to the family at large (Sonpar, 2005). The values and norms within the culture influence women to focus on care, family unity, and marriage stability, and in many cases, deprive them of the time to pursue personal emotional desires (Capstick, 2016). As a result, marital satisfaction in Pakistan is affected by more than just interpersonal relationships but by more socially-culturally expected factors. Although more studies are being conducted on mental health of women, relatively few studies have studied Pakistani women at the same time, as far as attachment styles and marital satisfaction are concerned, in monogamous and polygamous marriages. The current studies have centered on legal, religious or demographic aspects of polygamy and not in exploring the psychological processes involved in the functioning of the relationship.

Literature has continually shown that secure attachment results in greater marital satisfaction, and that attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance lead to worse relationship outcomes (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Fraley et al., 2000). The bulk of evidence available, however, has been produced in monogamous populations. There are relatively few studies on the processes of attachment in polygamous marriages especially in South Asian culture like in Pakistan. In addition, there is a paucity of empirical studies that have directly compared attachment anxiety, avoidance of attachment and marital satisfaction in women in monogamous and polygamous marriages using standardized psychological measures. This gap is significant to address since cultural beliefs, family backgrounds, and gender attitudes might influence attachment experiences in different ways in various marital set-ups. Thus, the given research will compare the marital satisfaction and attachment style of women in monogamous and polygamous marriages in Pakistan and add culturally significant information to the sphere of relationship psychology and family research.

III. METHOD

Participants

The current research used a cross-sectional mixed-methods research design to test the relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction in women in monogamous and polygamous marriages in Pakistan. The mixed-methods approach was chosen to get a global picture of the marital experiences of the participants as both quantitative measures and qualitative themed exploration are used. Despite the fact that both qualitative and quantitative data were obtained, the quantitative part of the study was the major one. Twenty married women were recruited using purposive sampling across various regions of Pakistan into the study. The sample was made up of 100 women in monogamous marriages and 100 women in polygamous marriages, enabling a direct comparison between the two marriages. Subjects were of various educational, occupational and socioeconomic backgrounds. According to inclusion criteria participants were eligible if they: Were married women aged 18 years and above; Had been married for at least one year; Had resided in a polygamous marriage in the polygamous group at least one year; and Had been cohabiting with the husband or a different household with the other wife/wives. By exclusion criteria participants were excluded if they: Were divorced, or widowed; Had been married less than one year in polygamy; or Had more than one intimate partner (not legally or religiously married).

Measures

[1] The respondents were given a demographic questionnaire that aimed at getting data about age, age at marriage, education level, age of the husband, number of children, socioeconomic status, type of marriage (monogamous or polygamous), consanguinity, and self-rated intimacy. These variables were employed to characterize the study sample and put the findings into context. **[2]** The Urdu version of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) created by Schumm et al. (1986) was used to measure marital satisfaction. The KMSS is a short 3-item measure that assesses the overall satisfaction of marriage, spouse, and the relationship of the respondents in their marriage. The responses were captured on a 7-point Likert scale with a 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied). The higher scores, the higher marital satisfaction. The Urdu version has

shown a reasonable internal consistency, with the reported Cronbachs alpha of .72 (Arif, 2012). [3] The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire (ECR-R) created by Fraley, Waller, and Brennan (2000) was used to measure attachment style. There are 36 items in the ECR-R, 18 in each of two dimensions of attachment, Attachment Anxiety (18 items) and Attachment Avoidance (18 items). The respondents were asked to answer on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree) were the options. The scores are higher, which means increased attachment insecurity. The Urdu version was found to be reasonably good in reliability, and Cronbachs alpha of: Attachment Anxiety =.81 and Attachment Avoidance =.86 (Arif, 2012). [4] The participants were also asked to fill out a researcher-constructed Cultural Myths Questionnaire which evaluated beliefs and perceptions about monogamy, polygamy, gender roles, marital equality, child outcomes, and attitudes to the community. The main purpose of responses was the descriptive and exploratory analysis as part of the overall mixed-methods research.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted with the ethical approval of the Department of Psychology, University of Karachi beforehand. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and written informed consent was obtained. The respondents were encouraged to volunteer to participate in the study and they were made aware that they were free to pull out of the study at any point with no fee. The research was conducted under confidentiality and anonymity. All datasets were anonymized, and the information collected was utilized solely in the research. The questionnaires were completed in a single sitting and participants completed the demographic form, KMSS, ECR-R and Cultural Myths Questionnaire. It took about 20-30 minutes to complete. IBM SPSS Statistics Version 28 was used to analyze data. To summarize the characteristics and responses of the participants to the Cultural Myths Questionnaire, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages) were used to summarize the characteristics and responses of the participants. Independent-samples t-tests were used to compare the marital happiness, intimacy, attachment anxiety, and attachment avoidance between women in monogamous and polygamous marriages. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the associations between dimensions of attachment, marital satisfaction, intimacy, and cultural myths. An alpha level of $p < .05$ was used to determine statistical significance. To estimate the group differences, Cohen ds (effect sizes) were computed.

IV.RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and inferential analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 28. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare women in monogamous and polygamous marriages on marital satisfaction, intimacy, and attachment dimensions. Effect sizes were estimated using Cohen's d, with values of 0.20, 0.50, and 0.80 representing small, medium, and large effects, respectively. Independent-samples *t* tests were conducted to compare women in monogamous and polygamous marriages on marital satisfaction, closeness and sincerity, contentment, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and total attachment insecurity.

Table 1: Differences in Marital Satisfaction, Intimacy, and Attachment Between Women in Monogamous and Polygamous Marriages

Variable	Monogamous (<i>n</i> = 100), <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Polygamous (<i>n</i> = 100), <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i> (198)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Marital satisfaction	18.42 (4.12)	14.62 (6.25)	5.08	< .001	0.72
Closeness and sincerity	6.12 (1.37)	5.31 (1.97)	3.38	< .001	0.48
Contentment	5.85 (1.47)	5.19 (2.00)	2.66	.008	0.38
Attachment anxiety	47.68 (22.88)	68.04 (28.57)	-5.56	< .001	0.79
Attachment avoidance	46.34 (20.71)	60.63 (28.21)	-4.08	< .001	0.58
Total ECR-R score	94.02 (36.63)	128.67 (51.91)	-5.45	< .001	0.77

Note. ECR-R = Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised.

As shown in Table 1, women in monogamous marriages reported significantly higher marital satisfaction ($M = 18.42$, $SD = 4.12$) than women in polygamous marriages ($M = 14.62$, $SD = 6.25$), $t(198) = 5.08$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d =$

0.72. This represented a medium-to-large difference. Women in monogamous marriages also reported significantly greater closeness and sincerity ($M = 6.12$, $SD = 1.37$) than women in polygamous marriages ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.97$), $t(198) = 3.38$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.48$. Similarly, women in monogamous marriages reported higher contentment ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 1.47$) than women in polygamous marriages ($M = 5.19$, $SD = 2.00$), $t(198) = 2.66$, $p = .008$, $d = 0.38$. Conversely, women in polygamous marriages reported significantly higher attachment anxiety ($M = 68.04$, $SD = 28.57$) than women in monogamous marriages ($M = 47.68$, $SD = 22.88$), $t(198) = -5.56$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.79$. Attachment avoidance was also significantly higher among women in polygamous marriages ($M = 60.63$, $SD = 28.21$) than among women in monogamous marriages ($M = 46.34$, $SD = 20.71$), $t(198) = -4.08$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.58$. Finally, women in polygamous marriages obtained higher total Experiences in Close Relationships scores ($M = 128.67$, $SD = 51.91$) than women in monogamous marriages ($M = 94.02$, $SD = 36.63$), $t(198) = -5.45$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.77$. Because higher ECR-R scores represent greater attachment anxiety and avoidance, this finding indicates higher overall attachment insecurity among women in polygamous marriages.

Table II: Correlations Among Study Variables for Women in Monogamous Marriages

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Closeness and sincerity	—					
2. Contentment	.768**	—				
3. Marital satisfaction	.665**	.535**	—			
4. Attachment anxiety	-.384**	-.344**	-.353**	—		
5. Attachment avoidance	-.479**	-.457**	-.567**	.411**	—	
6. Total Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised	-.510**	-.473**	-.541**	.857**	.822**	—

** $p < .01$.

Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted to examine associations among marital satisfaction, closeness, contentment, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and total attachment insecurity among women in monogamous marriages. As presented in Table 2, closeness and sincerity were strongly and positively associated with contentment, $r = .768$, $p < .01$, and marital satisfaction, $r = .665$, $p < .01$. Contentment was also positively associated with marital satisfaction, $r = .535$, $p < .01$. Attachment anxiety was negatively associated with closeness, $r = -.384$, $p < .01$; contentment, $r = -.344$, $p < .01$; and marital satisfaction, $r = -.353$, $p < .01$. Attachment avoidance was negatively associated with closeness, $r = -.479$, $p < .01$; contentment, $r = -.457$, $p < .01$; and marital satisfaction, $r = -.567$, $p < .01$. The total ECR-R score was also negatively associated with closeness, $r = -.510$, $p < .01$; contentment, $r = -.473$, $p < .01$; and marital satisfaction, $r = -.541$, $p < .01$. These findings indicate that greater attachment insecurity was associated with lower relationship satisfaction and intimacy in monogamous marriages.

Table III: Correlations Among Study Variables for Women in Polygamous Marriages

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Closeness and sincerity	—					
2. Contentment	.845**	—				
3. Marital satisfaction	-.103	-.078	—			
4. Attachment anxiety	-.499**	-.516**	.067	—		
5. Attachment avoidance	-.649**	-.641**	.097	.671**	—	
6. Total Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised	-.627**	-.632**	.090	.915**	.913**	—

** $p < .01$.

Table 3 presents the correlations for women in polygamous marriages. Closeness and sincerity were strongly and positively associated with contentment, $r = .845$, $p < .01$. However, marital satisfaction was not significantly associated with closeness, $r = -.103$, or contentment, $r = -.078$. Marital satisfaction was also not significantly

related to attachment anxiety, $r = .067$; attachment avoidance, $r = .097$; or the total ECR-R score, $r = .090$. Attachment anxiety was negatively associated with closeness, $r = -.499$, $p < .01$, and contentment, $r = -.516$, $p < .01$. Attachment avoidance was also negatively associated with closeness, $r = -.649$, $p < .01$, and contentment, $r = -.641$, $p < .01$. The total ECR-R score was negatively associated with closeness, $r = -.627$, $p < .01$, and contentment, $r = -.632$, $p < .01$. It was strongly positively associated with attachment anxiety, $r = .915$, $p < .01$, and attachment avoidance, $r = .913$, $p < .01$. These results suggest that attachment insecurity was strongly related to reduced intimacy and contentment among women in polygamous marriages, although it was not significantly associated with their KMSS marital satisfaction scores.

Table IV: Correlation Between Marital Satisfaction and the Belief That Polygamy Is Practiced in Certain Cultures

Variables	1	2
1. Marital satisfaction	—	
2. Belief that polygamy is culturally specific	-.058	—

A Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the association between marital satisfaction and the belief that polygamy is practiced only within certain cultures or religions. There was a very small, negative, and statistically non-significant relationship between the variables, $r = -.058$, $p = .471$. Therefore, the hypothesis that stronger endorsement of this cultural belief would be associated with lower marital satisfaction was not supported.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study investigated differences in attachment styles and marital satisfaction among women in monogamous and polygamous marriages in Pakistan. Guided by attachment theory, the study examined whether marital structure was associated with differences in marital satisfaction, intimacy, attachment anxiety, and attachment avoidance. Overall, the findings indicate that women in monogamous marriages reported significantly higher levels of marital satisfaction, closeness, and contentment, whereas women in polygamous marriages reported significantly greater attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and overall attachment insecurity. Among the most significant findings was that, women in monogamous marriages reported having a great deal of marital satisfaction compared to women in polygamous marriages. This observation is in line with other studies that have reported that marital relationships that are exclusive tend to offer a high degree of emotional security, partner responsiveness, and relationship stability as compared to relationships where emotional, financial and interpersonal resources were shared by multiple spouses (Fowers & Olson, 1993; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006). The current results are also consistent with the studies that allege that relationship exclusivity facilitates greater emotional involvement, trust, and good communication, which all help in increasing marital satisfaction (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

The differences can be explained with the help of attachment theory. Bowlby (1969, 1988) argues that secure attachment comes as a result of attachment figures always being available and responsive. In marriage, the partners often play a key role of attachment figures, offering solace, protection, and emotional stability amidst stresses (Hazan and Shaver, 1987). The exclusivity of the marital relationship in monogamous marriages can lead to easier emotional availability and responsiveness among the marriage partners and therefore attachment security and enhancing marital satisfaction. On the other hand, emotional attention and caregiving duties in polygamous marriages could be divided, which could lead to decreased perceptions of availability of partners, which in turn heightens insecurity and lowers relationship satisfaction. The results also revealed that women in monogamous marriages had much more intimacy and satisfaction as compared to women in polygamous marriages. Emotional proximity is one of the best predictors of the quality of relationships in the long term since it is an indicator of trust, intimacy, understanding, and emotional disclosure between couples (Laurenceau et al., 1998). Those couples where there is open communication and emotional responsiveness tend to report higher rates of satisfaction in the relationships since such actions support the sense of acceptance and psychological safety (Reis and Shaver, 1988).

Conversely, reduced proximity in women in polygamous unions might be an indication of the complicated relationship space of multiple-spouse units. The emotional attention competition, the unequal allocation of time, the perceived favoritism, and uncertainty about the family roles can decrease the chances of emotional intimacy between the husband and wife. Al-Krenawi and Graham (2006) have also reported similar observations whereby women in polygamous families often report having to endure feelings of emotional neglect, jealousy and reduced marital satisfaction. The experiences can slowly undermine emotional intimacy and perceptions of relationship quality. Another notable finding of the current research was the presence of a considerable amount of attachment anxiety in women with polygamous marriages. High levels of attachment anxiety are characterized by individuals being afraid of being rejected, in need of excessive reassurance, and are very sensitive to feeling rejected (Brennan et al., 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). These issues can be aggravated by relational dynamics of polygamous marriages since emotional and material resources have to be distributed between several wives and children. Therefore, women will get more and more uncertain about the level of emotional availability and commitment of their husband and it increases the level of attachment anxiety.

These results are quite consistent with the suggestion of Bowlby (1988) that inconsistent responsiveness of caregivers leads to attachment insecurity. Despite the fact that when formulating his theory, Bowlby primarily focused on child-caregiver interactions, a large amount of studies has shown that the same processes of attachment can be applied to adult romantic relationships (Hazan and Shaver, 1987). Attachment-related fears are triggered when partners experience inconsistent emotional responsiveness, leading to increased emotional distress and reduced relationship satisfaction. The increased levels of attachment anxiety in women in polygamous marriages thus seem theoretically congruous with the attachment theory and the past empirical evidence. Equally, women in polygamous marriages were found to report a lot of attachment avoidance in comparison to women in monogamous marriages. Attachment avoidance is the feeling of discomfort with emotional closeness, unwillingness to rely on others, as well as the rejection of attachment needs (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). It is possible that the repetitive experiences of emotional disappointment or perceived inequality can promote avoidant coping strategies. Instead of getting emotional support through their spouses, women may tend to emotionally isolate themselves in order to cushion themselves against any additional rejection or disappointment. This meaning coincides with the earlier work that has proposed that insecure attachment is a common adaptive reaction to unpredictable interpersonal treatment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Vulnerability can be dampened temporarily by emotional withdrawal, but it also restricts intimacy, communication and satisfaction in relationships. As a result, the avoidance of attachment tends to be self-reinforcing as decreased emotional disclosure further diminishes chances of positive interpersonal experiences.

The other significant result was that total ECR-R scores of women in polygamous marriages were much higher, which means that the overall attachment insecurity was higher. This finding also confirms the argument that relationship functioning can be affected by marital structure via psychological and not necessarily sociocultural processes. Even though religious and cultural rules could influence the acceptance of polygamy, it seems that emotional responses to the perceived availability of partners are still one of the primary factors defining the quality of the relationships. The results thus endorse the use of the attachment theory in the culturally diverse family systems and build on prior studies that have been mainly carried out in the monogamous settings of the West. The current results are not to be construed to imply that all polygamous marriages are psychologically dysfunctional or that all monogamous marriages are fulfilling. Marriage is not the only problem, as there is a plethora of interpersonal, economic, cultural, and individual factors that affect relationship quality. Instead, the results suggest that, in the current sample, women in monogamous marriages tended to report higher levels of emotional security and marital satisfaction compared to women in polygamous marriages. This difference matters since it is likely that the quality of interpersonal interactions is a determinant of psychological outcomes and not marital structure alone.

One notable contribution of the current study is that the relationship between attachment dimensions, intimacy and marital satisfaction have been explored separately among women in monogamous and polygamous marriages. The correlation studies revealed that there are specific patterns of relationships in the two types of marital structures implying that the process of attachment can vary according to the interpersonal and cultural context within which marriages are framed. In monogamous marriages, there was a positive correlation between marital

satisfaction and closeness, as well as contentment and negative correlation between attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance and all relationship quality indicators. Such results align with attachment theory that hypothesizes that secure attachment fosters emotional intimacy, trust, and adaptive interpersonal functioning (Bowlby, 1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). People who view their partners as being emotionally accessible and supportive tend to have higher relationship satisfaction since they can more easily communicate with each other, get support when faced with stressful events, and solve conflicts in a positive way (Simpson and Rholes, 2017).

The high positive correlation between proximity and marital satisfaction in the monogamous group confirms earlier studies that have stated that emotional intimacy is one of the most potent predictors of relationship quality (Laurenceau et al., 1998). Emotional intimacy enables partners to share personal experiences, be vulnerable and get the other partner to validate them, thus enhancing emotional attachment and making the relationship more stable. Attachment security is strengthened when intimacy is perpetually upheld, which leads to heightened satisfaction in the marriage in the long run. Attachment anxiety and avoidance, on the other hand, had moderate to strong negative correlations with marital satisfaction among women in monogamous marriages. These results align well with prior meta-analytic data that insecure attachment is always a predictive of lower relationship satisfaction in a variety of cultural settings (Li & Chan, 2012). The high in attachment anxiety individuals tend to have chronic fear about being abandoned and rejected and the avoidantly attached individuals tend to repress emotional needs and reduce interdependentness. Both attachment styles disrupt effective communication and conflict resolution and emotional support, thus lowering the overall quality of relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Interestingly, the trend of correlations varied significantly between women in polygamous marriages. Despite the fact that the closeness and contentment were still closely related to each other, marital satisfaction was not closely related to attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and intimacy. This result is contrary to much of the current attachment literature, and posits that marital satisfaction in polygamous relationships might be moderated by other contextual factors other than interpersonal attachment itself. The first reason could be that the marital satisfaction of polygamous families represents more family relations than only the emotional attachment between the spouses. Females in polygamous families often have to deal with relationship bargains not only with their spouses but with co-wives, children, and relatives. Therefore, marital satisfaction assessments can include perceptions of financial stability, equity, marital cohesion, religious devotion and social acceptance besides emotional intimacy. In this case, the psychological attachment can be one of a number of determinants that affect the general perception that women have of their marriages.

The other explanation is with regard to adaptive coping strategies. Those women, who stay in the long term polygamous marriage might eventually change the expectation of intimacy and emotional exclusivity. In collectivist cultures, marital constancy can be valued over personal emotional satisfaction, thereby promoting women to judge their marriages by family cohesion, instead of emotional fulfillment (Triandis, 1995). This cultural adaptation perhaps partially underlies the fact that the attachment insecurity had comparatively weaker relations with marital satisfaction in the polygamous group even though it was strongly related with intimacy. The results also revealed that there was a strong, positive association between attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance among both marriage groups; especially among women in polygamous marriages. The outcome is consistent with the modern attachment theory, which believes that the dimension of attachment anxiety and avoidance are individual but related dimensions of attachment insecurity as opposed to the mutual exclusive attachment styles (Brennan et al., 1998). Females who face the prolonged emotional uncertainty can also fear being abandoned and evade emotional dependence as a defense mechanism. These defensive mechanisms have been observed before in persons who have experienced intermittent interpersonal responsiveness and long-term relational stress (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

Among the most interesting results of the current research was the fact that there was no statistically significant relationship between cultural myths about polygamy and marital satisfaction. In opposition to the study hypothesis, the support of the cultural beliefs about polygamy was not linked to the assessment women made about their marriage. This result implies that the cultural narratives can not necessarily be the direct determinants of marital satisfaction. Rather, instant interpersonal experiences in the marriage union are seen to have more

effects than generalized cultural beliefs. This result could be explained by several factors. To begin with, cultural myths are not actual indicators of lived marital experiences, but social beliefs shared. People can support culturally provided beliefs about marriage and at the same time, consider their relationships based on personal emotional experiences. Therefore, support of cultural norms does not always result in increased or decreased marital satisfaction. Secondly, Pakistan is a culturally diverse society where the perceptions of polygamy are different among religious interpretations, socioeconomic status and education levels, and geographical areas. There are women who might see polygamy as a religiously acceptable family set up and others might see it as non-social. This variability can undermine the general relationship between cultural beliefs and marital satisfaction, leading to the nonsignificant relationship that was found in the current study.

Third, the attachment theory proposes that more direct effects on psychological well-being are created by interpersonal experiences than by abstract cultural beliefs. Bowlby (1988) observes that adult people can achieve emotional security by having regular experiences of responsiveness, care and trust in close relationships. Thus, although cultural discourses favor certain marital configurations, the satisfaction of relationships, however, remains based on the quality of daily interpersonal experiences and not on cultural ideology per se. The current results can be said to be in line with this theoretical view. The current results also emphasize the need to take into account the collectivist cultural background of Pakistan in the context of understanding the relationships within a marriage. Marriage in Pakistan does not just concern the couple but also binds one to their parents, siblings, in-laws and extended kinships. Women tend to experience marital relationships based on family honor, religious values, and collective responsibility, which affect the expression of emotions, coping, and views of relationship success. This means that the psychological models that have been developed in the societies that are mainly Western and individualistic must be cautiously read when applied to collectivist families. However, the attachment theory seems to be amazingly strong in intercultural settings. Despite that cultural norms may affect the realization of attachment behaviors, the need to be emotionally secure, trustful, and responsive seems to be universal (Mesman et al., 2016). The current results confirm this hypothesis by showing that relationship functioning in the case of attachment insecurity can be still poor even in the case of culturally different marital patterns.

Clinically, these results have significant implications to marital counseling and family therapy in Pakistan. Attachment interventions can assist couples to boost emotional communication, be more responsive to each other attachment needs and enhance relationship security. Couples who feel emotionally distant, are anxious about their attachment, or dissatisfied with their marriage may find therapeutic methods that explicitly focus on the attachment processes, like Emotionally Focused Therapy (Johnson, 2019), particularly helpful. In the case of women in polygamous marriages, psychological interventions are not limited to the marital dyad but are extended to the rest of relationships in the family such as relationships with co-wives, children and extended family members. The counselors should also be attentive to cultural and religious beliefs and ensure healthy communication, emotional validation and equal family relationships. Culturally competence-based interventions will probably be more effective than those that have been developed following Western models of relationships only. In general, the current results support the key hypothesis of attachment theory according to which emotional security is a key determinant of relationship quality. As much as cultural norms play a significant role in shaping the marital experiences, secure attachment seems to be a critical psychological asset underpinning marital satisfaction in various marital forms.

VI. CONCLUSION

The current research established that women in monogamous marriages had a much higher marital satisfaction, intimacy and relationship quality, as compared to women in polygamous marriages, who had a higher attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance and general attachment insecurity. Attachment insecurity also showed a negative correlation with marital satisfaction among women in monogamous marriages but not in polygamous marriages indicating that there could be other sociocultural and familial related factors that determine marital experiences in polygamous marriages. The cultural beliefs about polygamy did not have significant effects on marital satisfaction. On the whole, the results show that attachment security is a key factor leading to healthy marital relationships and that culturally-sensitive and attachment based interventions are needed to improve the marital well-being.

Although the study has limitations associated with sampling and cross sectional design, as well as self-report measures, it adds to the paucity of the research on marital relationships in Pakistan and sets the directions of future research that will consider additional psychosocial and family variables.

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