

ADULT ATTACHMENT, GRATITUDE TOWARD PARTNER, AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN NEWLY MARRIED INDIVIDUALS: A MODERATION ANALYSIS IN A PAKISTANI SAMPLE

Laviza Sahar^{a*}, & Madiha Masood^b

^{a,b} Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore Pakistan

*Correspondence to: Ms. Laviza Sahar, Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore Pakistan. Email: laviza618@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

There is a strong literature on the relationship between attachment orientation of adults and their satisfaction in the relationship and gratitude toward their partner, with most of this literature originating from individualistic societies found in the West, with little research available on how the two factors interact in early marriage in collectivist societies like Pakistan. The aims were to consider the connections between adult attachment, satisfaction with partner and satisfaction in the overall relationship in newlyweds, to test the effect of adult attachment on satisfaction beyond gratitude, to test the moderating effect of gratitude between the adult attachment and satisfaction association and to explore gender differences. Quantitative, Cross-sectional Correlational Design, with a purposive sample (and snow ball) of 200 legally married persons aged 20-40 years (101 males and 99 females) with a marriage period of up to four years. Participants filled out the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R; total score), the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6), and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). Pearson correlation, hierarchical multiple regression, independent-samples t tests, and PROCESS Macro Model 1 were used for data analysis. Adult attachment was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r(198) = .143, p = .043$), and uniquely predicted relationship satisfaction when controlling for gratitude ($\beta = .143, p = .045$), with the addition of the reported variance ($\Delta R^2 = .020$) being very small and not large enough to rule out the possibility of random error. Gratitude was unrelated to attachment ($r = -.104, p = .145$) and to satisfaction ($r = -.019, p = .789$), and did not moderate the attachment-satisfaction association ($B = 0.002, p = .226$). There was a non-significant difference between the genders for gratitude; women reported higher attachment scores than men ($d = -0.43, p = .003$), but there was no significant difference between the genders for satisfaction. Satisfaction was modestly correlated with attachment independent of gratitude in this sample of early married couples. The direction of the attachment effect was contrary to theory, and should be replicated with separate scores on anxiety and avoidance scales and dyadic, longitudinal designs.

I. INTRODUCTION

Close relations are one of the most significant aspects of human life and the marriage relationship is the most salient adult relationship in all societies. At the same time, it is a contract, a social and religious institution, and a close relationship. Married people tend to experience greater mental health and life satisfaction than those who are unmarried or divorced or do not feel happy in their marriage and the quality of marriage has an effect on mental and physical health that extends beyond the day of the wedding (Karney & Bradbury, 2020). It is thus a

fundamental question in relationship science and in clinical practice to understand what would make spouses happy in their relationships. Especially, the early years of marriage are crucial. In creating a shared life, there are bound to be some differences between partners in personality, habit, communication, money, and extended family expectations that will need to be negotiated. As is often the case, satisfaction is on the high side during this period, but it is not uniform; in fact, cross-sectional research on newlyweds indicates that people who are less satisfied when they first marry may be the ones who experience the greatest drop (Williamson & Lavner, 2020; Bühler et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023). The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation model suggests that marital outcomes are influenced by individual vulnerabilities that persist over time (attachment insecurity), by stressful life events, and by adaptive coping mechanisms that couples employ to deal with them (Karney & Bradbury, 2020). In this context attachment insecurity can be understood as a vulnerability, while the gratefulness towards the partner can be understood as a resource in the relationship context.

The attachment theory of Bowlby (1969) was extended to adult romantic relationships by Hazan and Shaver (1987), which posits that early caregiving experiences are internalised as working models that affect emotion regulation and behaviour in close relationships. Attachment anxiety, defined as fear of abandonment and a need for reassurance, and attachment avoidance, defined as discomfort with closeness and dependence, are two dimensions typically described by individual differences, as measured by the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised scale (ECR-R; Fraley et al., 2000). Securely attached individuals have positive self and partner models and act supportive, while anxious individuals over activate and avoidant individuals under-activate attachment-related emotions, each of which can negatively impact partner responsiveness and intimacy. In line with this narrative, insecure attachment has been associated with reduced relationship satisfaction via perceived conflict (Brassard et al., 2009), communication difficulties (Mardani et al., 2021), and financial-management problems among young newlyweds (Li et al., 2023); actor and partner effects of anxiety and avoidance on relationship functioning were also found in dyadic work (Rodriguez et al., 2021). Evidence from Pakistan is, however, mixed. The relationships between communication patterns and marital satisfaction have been found to be a pathway between insecure attachment and marital satisfaction in married Pakistani adults (Zainab et al., 2025); while a small study that compared the relationship between attachment style and marital satisfaction in arranged and love marriages found no significant association between them (Arif & Fatima, 2015).

Gratitude is the feeling of being grateful for something that someone else has given you (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). In romantic relationships, it is considered a positive emotion that creates long-term resources in the relationship (Fredrickson, 2001) and, as suggested by the find-remind-bind theory, partners become more aware of responsive behaviour, of the partner's value and becoming more bound together (Algoe, 2012). There have been reports of correlation between expressions of gratitude and increased relationship and marital satisfaction (Saeidi et al., 2019; Park et al., 2023), including in Pakistani couples where dyadic coping-based gratitude was found to partially mediate the relationship of dyadic coping with satisfaction (Shujja et al., 2022; Shujja & Adil, 2024). The research on attachment and gratitude is also combined. Dispositional gratitude has been related to a negative correlation with anxious and avoidant attachment and a positive correlation with relationship satisfaction (Dioszeghy, 2018), with gratitude toward the partner related to a significant positive relationship with relationship satisfaction (Vollmann et al., 2019). Further, experimental and multi-method research indicates that expressions of gratitude from one's partner can shield against the detrimental consequences of attachment insecurity on satisfaction and commitment (Park et al., 2019). The advantages of gratitude are not universal, however, and are dependent on disposition, mood, and expression style (Leong et al., 2020) and power (He et al., 2024) in the relationship. The link between attachment and satisfaction among newlyweds has not yet been tested in the context of non-Western cultures, with the aim of seeing whether dispositional gratitude can moderate this relationship.

Most of this literature stems from single-person and western samples and may not be generalisable. Collectivism, Islamic beliefs, extensive involvement of family in marriage, a high rate of arranged and semi-arranged marriages and the presence of newlyweds living with or near the husband's family all influence marriage in Pakistan. Spouses meet each other for only a short time prior to marriage, and build their relationship mostly after the wedding, creating a critical period of adjustment in the first years of marriage. Here, the importance of attachment and of gratitude (as perhaps it is a moral obligation of the partners, not a virtue) can differ from what is seen in the West.

There is no previous study that investigated adult attachment and gratitude toward the partner simultaneously as correlates of relationship satisfaction in newly married people in Pakistan to our knowledge. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate four aspects: (a) the relationship between adult attachment and satisfaction with the romantic relationship; (b) the relationship between gratitude toward partner and satisfaction with the romantic relationship, and whether or not adult attachment predicts satisfaction beyond gratitude; and (c) gender differences in attachment and gratitude. The following hypotheses were tested:

H1: Satisfaction in marriage is significantly related to adult attachment for newly married couples.

H2: The Overall adult attachment variable is significantly related to (predicts) gratitude toward partner.

H3: The relationship between attachment and relationship satisfaction is moderated by gratitude: insecure attachment had a negative impact on relationship satisfaction at higher levels of gratitude.

H4: There are significant gender differences in adult attachment.

As exploratory analyses, gender differences in gratitude and satisfaction were explored.

II. METHOD

Participants

A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was employed to estimate the strength and direction of relationships between attachment, gratitude for partner and relationship satisfaction. The use of a correlational approach was appropriate as these dispositional variables could not be experimentally manipulated and the interest was in examining the inter-relations, and predicting the value of these variables, rather than establishing causation. The participants were selected by non-probability purposive sampling supported by snowball sampling, universities and educational institutions, community, personal and social network and online platforms (WhatsApp and social media) with age ranging from 20-40 years. A minimum sample size of $N = 200$ was targeted and the final sample consisted of 200 newly married individuals married in the last four years and residing with their spouse. Samples were recruited in Pakistan, mainly in Lahore. Summary of eligibility criteria is below:

Inclusion criteria

- Legally married individuals;
- Length of marriage (one to four years – “newly married”);
- Both men and women;
- Able to understand Urdu or English.

Exclusion criteria

- The presence of a severe psychological disorder (such as a psychotic disorder, severe depression) that could significantly affect perception of the relationship or the ability to accurately respond;
- Attaching to a marital therapist or marital counsellor, as this could affect attachment, gratitude and satisfaction;
- Lack of understanding of Urdu/English, which are the languages of administration;
- Respondents that fail to complete or respond to parts of the questionnaire;
- The study excluded separated, divorced or widowed.

Measures

Demographic data (gender, age, socioeconomic status, and length of marriage) were collected from participants and three standardised, self-report scales were completed. [I] Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised (ECR-R; Fraley et al., 2000) was used to assess attachment, a 36-item, 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) comprised of subscales for attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Adult attachment was measured as a continuous variable in this study by the total score for the ECR-R which indexed the level of overall attachment insecurity. Anxiety and avoidance were thus not separated out for analysis. [II] The measure of gratitude was the six item version of the Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6; McCullough et al., 2002; Emmons & McCullough, 2003), adapted for the partner context, and scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). The scale is one-dimensional, with items 3 and 6 reverse scored and the six items totalled to give a score that represents level of gratitude. Previous research has found Cronbach's alpha scores ranging around .80–

.87. [III] Global relationship satisfaction was assessed using the seven items of the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988) that were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The RAS is a one-dimensional measure of satisfaction consisting of the degree to which the partner fulfills one's needs and the overall degree of satisfaction with the relationship compared to others. Items 4 and 7 are reverse-scored and items are totaled to have higher scores reflecting higher satisfaction. Previous research indicates that alpha varies around .80–.90. Reliability for the present sample is presented in the Results.

Procedure

The data gathering was made in compliance with ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects and formal approval from the departmental research committee/ethical review board. The instruments were then checked for clarity and sequencing and compiled into a structured questionnaire which included an informed consent form, a demographic information sheet, the ECR-R (The Acute Situations Rating Scale), and the GQ-6 (General Quality of Life). Participants either hand-delivered the questionnaires to the researcher in a quiet and comfortable space where the researcher could clarify any questions they may have or handed their consent form and completed the questionnaires later, or completed the questionnaires in a Google Form; they were first presented with the consent form before carrying on. The total time period taken to complete was around 15-20 minutes. Responses were then checked for completeness and missing data were processed accordingly, and reverse-keyed items were recoded before scoring. The participants were provided with information regarding the purpose, procedures, risks and benefits of the study, and provided informed consent prior to participation. It was a voluntary participation, there was no withdrawal restrictions, no identifying data, such as names, were collected. The answers were anonymous and treated strictly as research data, all hard copies were kept in a secure file and all online data were kept in a secure folder that was password protected and only accessible by the researcher. All data were analysed using SPSS (Version 26). Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) were used to summarise the sample and study variables and Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal consistency. Skewness, kurtosis, histograms and normal Q-Q plots were used to assess normality. Associations between two variables were explored with bivariate associations (H1 and H2) examined using Pearson product-moment correlations. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine if attachment predicted satisfaction when gratitude was first entered into the model. Moderation (H3) was tested using the PROCESS macro-Model 1 (Hayes, 2022) in which relationship satisfaction was regressed on attachment, gratitude, and the interaction of the two. The *t* test for independent samples with Cohen's *d* was used to compare differences between genders (H4). The significance level was $\alpha = .05$.

III. RESULTS

Table I: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 200)

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	101	50.5
Female	99	49.5
Age (years)		
20–25	61	30.5
26–30	78	39.0
31–40	61	30.5
Socioeconomic status		
Low class	19	9.5
Middle class	144	72.0
High class	37	18.5
Duration of marriage		
1 month–1 year	53	26.5
2 years	49	24.5
3 years	44	22.0
4 years	54	27.0

Table 1 shows Demographic data for the 200 participants. There was a fairly even split by gender (50.5% male, 49.5% female). The largest age group was 26–30 years (39.0%), followed by equal proportions aged 20–25 and 31–40 years (30.5% each). Most of the participants were from a middle socioeconomic group (72.0 %), high (18.5 %) and low (9.5 %). The duration of marriage was fairly even, with 27.0 per cent of the married population having been married for four years, 26.5 per cent for one month to one year, 24.5 per cent for two years, and 22.0 per cent for three years.

Table II: Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, Normality, and Pearson Correlations among Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	M	SD	Range	α	Normality		Correlations		
					Skew.	Kurt.	1	2	3
1. Adult attachment (ECR-R)	136.79	35.72	37–230	.914	−0.370	0.477	—		
2. Gratitude toward partner (GQ-6)	25.57	4.70	13–37	.706	−0.096	−0.099	−.104	—	
3. Relationship satisfaction (RAS)	22.29	4.66	14–34	.714	0.322	−0.626	.143*	−.019	—

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha; Skew. = skewness; Kurt. = kurtosis. Higher ECR-R scores indicate greater attachment insecurity. Exact *p* values: attachment–satisfaction *p* = .043; attachment–gratitude *p* = .145; gratitude–satisfaction *p* = .789. **p* < .05.

A summary of descriptive data, reliability, indices of normalcy and zero-order correlations are presented in Table 2. Mean scores were 136.79 (SD = 35.72) for adult attachment (range 37–230), 25.57 (SD = 4.70) for gratitude toward partner (range 13–37), and 22.29 (SD = 4.66) for relationship satisfaction (range 14–34). The measures were reliable enough for further analysis, as the alpha level were excellent for the ECR-R (.914) and acceptable for the GQ-6 (.706) and RAS (.714). The skewness values (range of −0.370 to 0.322) and the kurtosis values (range of −0.626 to 0.477) were within acceptable limits, and the histograms were approximately bell-shaped with minor tail deviations in the Q–Q plots. Therefore, assumption of normality was deemed to be satisfied, and Pearson correlation and regression were used. In line with H1, there was a significant and positive correlation between adult attachment and relationship satisfaction, with the correlation being small ($r(198) = .143$, *p* = .043), as presented in Table 2. The adult attachment was not significantly correlated with gratitude toward partner ($r(198) = -.104$, *p* = .145), thus H2 was not supported. Similarly, there was no association between gratitude towards the partner and relationship satisfaction ($r(198) = -.019$, *p* = .789).

Table III: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Gratitude toward Partner (Step 1) and Adult Attachment (Step 2) (N = 200)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI for B [LL, UL]
Step 1						
(Constant)	22.768	1.829	—	12.445	< .001	[19.161, 26.376]
Gratitude toward partner (GQ-6)	−0.019	0.070	−.019	−0.269	.789	[−0.158, 0.120]
<i>R</i> = .019, <i>R</i> ² = .000, adjusted <i>R</i> ² = −.005, ΔF = 0.072						
Step 2						
(Constant)	19.846	2.324	—	8.540	< .001	[15.263, 24.429]
Gratitude toward partner (GQ-6)	−0.004	0.070	−.004	−0.061	.952	[−0.143, 0.134]
Adult attachment (ECR-R)	0.019	0.009	.143	2.015	.045*	[0.000, 0.037]
<i>R</i> = .143, <i>R</i> ² = .021, adjusted <i>R</i> ² = .011, ΔR^2 = .020, ΔF = 4.058, <i>p</i> = .045*						

Note. B = unstandardised coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardised coefficient; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; ΔR^2 = change in explained variance. **p* < .05.

A hierarchical multiple regression analyzed the role of attachment on the prediction of relationship satisfaction beyond the role of gratitude (Table 3). In Step 1, gratitude did not significantly predict satisfaction (*B* = −0.019, β = −.019, *t* = −0.269, *p* = .789), and the model explained essentially no variance (*R*² = .000, adjusted *R*² = −.005). The addition of adult attachment in Step 2 resulted in a significant increase in model fit (ΔF = 4.058, *p* = .045) and a

significant increase in model variance ($R^2 = .021$, adjusted $R^2 = .011$; $\Delta R^2 = .020$). Adult attachment was a significant positive predictor ($B = 0.019$, $\beta = .143$, $t = 2.015$, $p = .045$), such that higher ECR-R scores were associated with higher satisfaction, whereas gratitude remained non-significant ($B = -0.004$, $\beta = -.004$, $t = -0.061$, $p = .952$). Thus, attachment accounted for a small but significant unique variance with regard to satisfaction, but no unique variance with regard to gratitude.

Table IV: Moderation Analysis (PROCESS Model 1) Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Adult Attachment, Gratitude toward Partner, and Their Interaction (N = 200)

Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
(Constant)	22.33	0.33	67.85	< .001	21.68	22.98
Adult attachment	0.02	0.01	2.07	.039*	0.001	0.037
Gratitude toward partner	0.01	0.07	0.14	.890	-0.130	0.150
Adult attachment × Gratitude toward partner	0.002	0.002	1.21	.226	-0.002	0.006
Model: $F(3, 196) = 1.87$, $p = .136$, $R^2 = .028$						

Note. *B* = unstandardised coefficient; *SE* = standard error; LLCI/ULCI = lower/upper limits of the 95% confidence interval. * $p < .05$.

The relationship between attachment and satisfaction was examined to see if that association was mediated by gratitude toward partner in PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2022) (Table 4). The overall model was not significant ($F(3, 196) = 1.87$, $p = .136$, $R^2 = .028$). Attachment again significantly predicted satisfaction ($B = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $t = 2.07$, $p = .039$, 95% CI [0.001, 0.037]), whereas gratitude did not ($B = 0.01$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 0.14$, $p = .890$, 95% CI [-0.130, 0.150]). Critically, the Attachment × Gratitude interaction was not significant ($B = 0.002$, $SE = 0.002$, $t = 1.21$, $p = .226$, 95% CI [-0.002, 0.006]). Thus, the relationship between attachment–satisfaction and gratitude did not vary and H3 was not confirmed.

Table V: Independent-Samples *t* Tests for Gender Differences in Adult Attachment, Gratitude toward Partner, and Relationship Satisfaction (N = 200)

Variable	Male ($n = 101$) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Female ($n = 99$) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i> (198)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Adult attachment (ECR-R)	129.37 (36.72)	144.35 (33.16)	-3.03	.003*	-0.43
Gratitude toward partner (GQ-6)	25.44 (4.69)	25.70 (4.74)	-0.39	.695	-0.06
Relationship satisfaction (RAS)	21.67 (4.40)	22.91 (4.85)	-1.89	.061	-0.27

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation. Negative *t* and *d* values indicate higher scores among women. * $p < .05$.

Independent samples *t* tests were used to compare sex for men and women (Table 5). Women ($M = 144.35$, $SD = 33.16$) scored significantly higher than men ($M = 129.37$, $SD = 36.72$) on adult attachment, $t(198) = -3.03$, $p = .003$, with a small-to-moderate effect ($d = -0.43$); H4 was therefore supported. Men ($M = 25.44$, $SD = 4.69$) and women ($M = 25.70$, $SD = 4.74$) did not differ in gratitude toward partner ($t(198) = -0.39$, $p = .695$, $d = -0.06$). Relationship satisfaction was slightly higher among women ($M = 22.91$, $SD = 4.85$) than men ($M = 21.67$, $SD = 4.40$), but the difference did not reach significance ($t(198) = -1.89$, $p = .061$, $d = -0.27$).

IV. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the relationship between adult attachment and relationship satisfaction among 200 newly-wed couples of Pakistan. The link between attachment and satisfaction had a small but significant independent association, whereas the link between gratitude and satisfaction was not significant, and had no moderation effect on the link between attachment and satisfaction, and women scored higher on attachment but not on the other measures. The discussion of each finding is presented one at a time. H1 was supported as attachment was found to be positively correlated with satisfaction ($r = .143$) and it was a significant predictor even after controlling for gratitude (2.0% of explained variance). This finding aligns with the broader attachment theory that the dynamics of attachment extend into adult romantic relationships (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and with the results found in other studies that indicated the relevance of attachment in satisfaction of newlywed

and Pakistani samples (Li et al., 2023; Zainab et al., 2025). The effect was small, consistent with the belief that satisfaction is influenced by many factors in addition to attachment, such as communication, finances, family involvement and personality (Karney & Bradbury, 2020).

Care needs to be taken in interpreting the direction of the association. Due to the negative correlation between ECR-R total scores and attachment insecurity, theory and most previous research (e.g., Vollmann et al., 2019) would expect a negative relationship with satisfaction. There are a few possibilities as to why. First, the total score reflects both anxiety and avoidance, which can relate to satisfaction in different ways, and might have obscured dimension specific effects, which the present analysis cannot separate; second, the present analysis was not able to separate a secure orientation from an anxious orientation and/or avoidance. Second, the collectivist, family-oriented nature of marriage in Pakistan with prevalence of family involvement, interspousal expectations, and communal support of new marriages could lessen some of the interpersonal costs of insecure attachment among new partners in the early years of marriage. This is similar to the findings of null attachment–satisfaction association reported by another sample in Pakistan (Arif & Fatima, 2015). Thirdly, there is no exclusion of a measurement or scoring artefact peculiar to this sample. The result is preliminary, due to the small effect size, and needs to be replicated in studies using separate scales for anxiety and avoidance.

H2 wasn't supported. In the model, attachment did not predict gratitude nor was there a relationship between attachment and gratitude. This is contrary to the previous research which reported that insecure attachment was associated with decreased gratitude and that gratitude was associated with increased satisfaction (Dioszeghy, 2018; Vollmann et al., 2019). There are multiple reasons that could apply. Day-to-day relationships and support offered to the spouse by the partner may be more important than enduring attachment orientation in new marriages in fostering gratitude. Kindness and support are seen as moral duties of husband and wife in Pakistan and this may make them less likely than Western couples to elicit, or to express freely, gratitude. Aggregating anxiety and avoidance may also have masked opposing relationships with gratitude. Last but not least, the gratitude of a couple can build up over time with shared experience, and couples who have been together for just a few years may not have fully developed it.

In contrast with H3, the attachment–satisfaction association did not moderate the relationship between gratitude, and gratitude was not predictive of satisfaction. While gratitude is believed to enhance relationships through feeling grateful, responsive, and connected (Algoe, 2012), it has been also proven to buffer insecure attachment (Park et al., 2019), its effects may be contingent on the form and content of its expression, and the relational context in which it is expressed (Leong et al., 2020; He et al., 2024). Emotional, communicative, and coping processes may be more important than dispositional gratitude, as newlyweds are still settling their needs and expectations. Gratitude is also seen as less well-defined as a separate virtue in collectivist cultures, where marriage is seen as a responsibility that should be fulfilled for one's spouse. Further, the expression of gratitude may have been found to be intrusive for the avoidant individuals, while it may have been found to be nurturing for the anxious individuals, and a combination of both may have been nullified by pooling them together in one score. A cross-sectional design, which failed to account for any changes over time, would also not be able to capture the changes in gratitude over time.

The hypothesis for H4 was accepted: Women scored significantly higher than men on the attachment measure ($d = -0.43$). This is possible because women are more likely to accept their emotions and close relationships, socialisation and gender roles in traditional male dominated societies like Pakistan where women are expected to invest and give importance to relationships and men are expected to be economically self-reliant and emotionally restrained. It is not clear if the difference is in anxiety or avoidance or both, as total score has been analysed. There were no differences between men and women in their level of gratitude to partner, indicating that gratitude is shared and reciprocal between partners in early marriage, and no differences in relationship satisfaction (higher among women), indicating generally similar satisfaction between newly married husbands and wives. This similarity could be due to the novelty of the marriages, cultural attitudes towards marital commitment and how satisfaction is multi-determined.

Implications

Theoretically, the results indicate that two concepts attachment and gratitude, which have usually been investigated together in the domain of attachment theory and positive psychology, did not work as they would be expected in this early marriage Pakistani sample. They highlight the importance of a more complex pattern of attachment across cultures and over time in a relationship, and also point to the need to validate scoring processes, and that gratitude cannot be used as a simple marker of satisfaction. On the practical level, attachment was a more stable relationship than gratitude with satisfaction; therefore, guiding relationships through premarital counselling and marital psychoeducation could be beneficial in addressing attachment-related processes. There is empirical support for attachment-focused couple approaches, like emotionally focused therapy (EFT), (Wiebe & Johnson, 2016); however, with small effect sizes found here, the current data do not support the use of these approaches over other treatments for newlyweds.

Limitations

Causal inferences cannot be drawn from the cross-sectional design and it does not show how attachment, gratitude, and satisfaction relate to each other over time. All the variables were assessed as single-time-point self-report, thus limiting the potential of common-method bias; only one member of the marriage was assessed, and thus dyadic processes were not modeled. Only the ECR-R score was analysed, and the unique contributions of attachment anxiety and avoidance were not differentiated, and the unexpected direction of the attachment effect was not diagnosed. There was little variance explained by the model ($R^2 = .021$), suggesting that the model did not include important predictors, including communication, conflict resolution, sexual satisfaction, financial stress, and in-law involvement. Non-probability sample ($N = 200$) was selected with the main focus of the study being one city (Lahore) which reduced the statistical precision and generalisability of the study to the wider population of Pakistan. Associations were weak in the GQ-6 and RAS, and were only acceptable in this sample ($\alpha \approx .71$).

Recommendations for future research

Increase independence of scores on attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (and, if possible, security) to show the distinct ways that they relate to gratitude and satisfaction. Discuss long-term studies and the direction of effects and changes in marital adjustment. Utilize dyadic designs (actor-partner interdependence models) with both partners of the couple. Increase province, ethnic, urban and rural and social class sample size. Assess the associations between newlyweds and longer-married couples to see if there is a difference in the associations between marital stages. Add more predictors, potential moderators, and mediators, such as communication skills, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, forgiveness, empathy, commitment, and social support.

V. CONCLUSION

Grateful to partner was not correlated with attachment or satisfaction and did not moderate the relationship between attachment and satisfaction; however, adult attachment was a small but significant independent correlate of relationship satisfaction in a sample of 200 newly married Pakistani individuals. No gender differences in gratitude or satisfaction, but women reported higher attachment scores than men. The direction of the association between the attachment and the satisfaction was the opposite of what was theoretically predicted, and needs to be confirmed using attachment separately scored dimensions. In general, the results provide further support for the need to study attachment relationships and gratitude in dyadic, longitudinal, and culturally adapted designs in order to gain insights into their role in the development of satisfaction during the first years of marriage.

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