

EMOTIONAL ABUSE AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION AMONG MARRIED WORKING WOMEN IN PAKISTAN: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SELF-ESTEEM

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ABSTRACT

Emotional abuse occurred in marital relationships is a major psychological issue that can be linked to women's self-esteem and marital relationship fulfillment. The use of criticism, humiliation, intimidation, manipulation and controlling behaviour can cause emotional insecurity and have a negative impact on relationship evaluations. The present study aimed to explore the correlation between emotional abuse and marital relationship satisfaction among married working women of Rawalpindi – Islamabad twin cities, Pakistan with the role of self-esteem assumed as a mediator. The study employed a quantitative, cross sectional correlational design of 200 married working women who were drawn using purposive sampling. A demographic information sheet, an emotional abuse measure, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) were used to assess data. Data available were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlations, and one-way analysis of variance. Emotional abuse was negatively correlated with marital relationship satisfaction, $r = -.389$, $p < .001$. However, emotional abuse was positively correlated with self-esteem, $r = .215$, $p = .002$, contrary to the expected direction. Self-esteem was not significantly correlated with marital relationship satisfaction, $r = .003$, $p = .965$. No major differences were found between working-hour groups with regard to emotional abuse or relationship satisfaction. Because indirect-effect analysis is not provided, the available results do not provide evidence for the mediation of self-esteem between emotional abuse and relationship satisfaction. The results underscore the need to investigate emotional abuse and marital relationship satisfaction, and to validate the instrument scores and proposed mediation model.

I. INTRODUCTION

Emotional abuse is a type of psychological maltreatment which can include persistent criticism or humiliation in an intimate relationship, intimidation, threats, manipulation, isolation and controlling behaviour. May be hard to spot or report because it may not lead to physical injuries. However, if psychological abuse is repeated, it can erode emotional security, trust, personal autonomy and the quality of relationships. People who are exposed to emotional abuse can feel distressed, helpless, lack confidence and have trouble with interpersonal relationships. Marital relationship satisfaction is the subjective assessment of a person's marital relationship. It can be a sign of emotional bonding, interaction, admiration, friendship and satisfaction. If a marriage is marked with repeated humiliation, rejection, manipulation and psychological control, it can make the partner feel unsafe and

unsupported. Thus, emotional abuse may relate to decreased marital relationship satisfaction. Emotional abuse can be especially difficult to identify, as negative interactions with partners can become the norm. Others may view ongoing criticism or controlling behavior as a natural aspect of married life, while others are too embarrassed to report their experiences, or are afraid they will be judged in society, or they may be on the verge of emotional or financial exhaustion, or they may feel their family may expect them to adjust, or they may feel they feel dependent on their partner. These barriers can prevent the identification of emotional abuse and access to support.

Working women who are married can handle the duties of their work, household, child and marriage at the same time. A paid job can offer you monetary funds, socialization, and personal growth. When there is unequal responsibility for domestic and care work, though, work can impose other demands. These competing demands can add to stress and impact women's perceptions of their relationships. The marital experiences of people in Pakistan are influenced by various factors, such as their personal, family, economic, and sociocultural experiences. Some women may access supportive relationships and resources, while others may not feel comfortable talking about their marital problems and may not have access to professional assistance. Hence, emotional abuse and marital relationship satisfaction should be explored in relation to the Pakistani context, as the results obtained in other population may not necessarily be applicable to all women in Pakistan. There are also differences among working women in terms of their occupations, work hours, length of employment, education and family responsibilities. These factors might play a role in their experiences of emotional abuse and marital satisfaction. But employment should not be equated with the likelihood of emotional abuse being increased or decreased. It is important to determine whether occupational characteristics are related to marital experiences in a population under investigation through empirical investigation.

Self-esteem is a person's self-assessment of his or her value. Reflects a general positive or negative attitude toward oneself and can affect the way people perceive interpersonal experiences, react to criticism, and assess personal skills and interpersonal relationships. Excessive criticism, humiliation, rejection and devaluation may be linked to alterations in self-perception. These can lead to self-doubt, loss of confidence and self-evaluation over time. Emotional abuse can therefore be related to self-esteem and the perception of relationships in marital relationships. Self-esteem, however, should not be used as an indicator of the occurrence of emotional abuse or as an excuse to blame the victim of emotional abuse. Abusive behavior is the responsibility of the individual doing the abuse. A focus on self-esteem as a psychological factor does not mean that self-esteem can be raised to the exclusion of, or in place of, other factors which might contribute to the prevention or resolution of emotional abuse. A mediator is a variable that possibly statistically explains some of the relationship between a predictor and an outcome. In this study, emotional abuse is predicted, self-esteem is proposed as the mediator, and marital relationship satisfaction is the outcome.

The proposed model indicated that self-esteem may be related to marital relationship satisfaction and the latter may be related to emotional abuse. The relationship between psychological maltreatment and marital relationship evaluations is explained in this model. The relationship between the two (indirect: via self-esteem) is not a priori, but needs to be tested. Some other factors may be linked to emotional abuse and marital satisfaction, such as communication in the relationship, depression symptoms, financial status, and interpersonal conflict. Given the cross-sectional design of the present study, it is not possible to establish the temporal sequence that would allow establishing a causal mediation process. Therefore, any indirect effect that is statistically significant would be interpreted as an indirect relationship, not as a secondary effect of emotional abuse on self-esteem, and then on marital satisfaction. Thus, any indirect effect that was statistically significant would be interpreted as an indirect relationship, but not as an effect of emotional abuse on self-esteem that then leads to lower marital satisfaction. The objectives are the following:

1. To describe the relationship between emotional abuse and marital relationship satisfaction among married working women in Pakistan.
2. To explore the links between emotional abuse and self-esteem.
3. To explore the association between self-esteem and marital relationship satisfaction.
4. To explore the mediating effect of self-esteem between emotional abuse and marital relationship satisfaction.

5. To investigate the relationship between certain demographic and occupational features and the main features of the study.

II. METHOD

Participants

A cross-sectional correlational design was used for the study to explore the relationship between emotional abuse, self-esteem, and marital relationship satisfaction. Self-report questionnaires were used to collect data at a single time point. This design allows for the study of correlations and statistical indirect effects but not causal connections or the sequence of events between variables. The sample comprised of 200 married working women from twin cities of Rawalpindi- Islamabad, Pakistan. The participants might have come from different occupational backgrounds, and different ages, education levels, working hours, employment experience, length of marriage, family system and number of children. The participants were recruited using purposive, nonprobability sampling technique for those who qualified for the study. If an a priori power analysis was performed, it should be reported, since there may be different sample sizes for sufficient power to detect mediation effects and/or differences among subgroups.

Measures

[I] The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item instrument for self-esteem which includes a general self-esteem scale. The responses are marked on a four-point scale, but the wording and marking conventions may be different between versions. Specific version of the measure should be described, including reverse-scoring of negatively worded items. The higher the total score, the more appropriate the interpretation in terms of the scoring system chosen. The internal consistency for the sample under consideration should be computed. **[II]** The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988) is a seven-item measure to assess a general satisfaction rating of a romantic relationship. Items are scored on 5-point response options, directions for scoring are different depending on the item wording. The negatively worded item should be reverse-scored following the original directions. When scored correctly, a higher score represents a higher level of relationship satisfaction. It is important there is evidence that it is appropriate for measuring satisfaction with the marital relationship, and that the version administered is reliable. **[III]** The first suggestion was for the use of an emotional abuse questionnaire based on the work of Jacobson and Gottman (1998). Ensure the instrument's exact name, original publication, authorship, item number, response format, scoring procedure and psychometric properties are correct prior to submission of the final manuscript. If a measure other than a validated instrument was used, use the actual name for the instrument and reference for it. Only report cut-off values when validated with original instrument documentation or appropriate validation evidence.

Procedure

Eligible participants were recruited using proper procedures after approval by institutions and permissions required. Prior to informed consent, the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature and confidentiality arrangements were explained. The participants then filled in a demographic data form followed by the questionnaires for the study. Questionnaires were distributed and instructions given so that their responses were not influenced. All completed forms were reviewed, coded and entered in statistical software for analysis. Participants were able to refuse answering any questions or drop out at any time without penalty and confidential information regarding support was given when applicable. Where possible, identifying data was omitted from the analysis data set.

III. RESULTS

Table I: Descriptive Statistics and Distributional Characteristics of Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	M	SD	Range	Skewness
Age	35.12	9.83	18-59	.37
Relationship satisfaction (RAS)	24.81	5.26	11-80	2.38
Self-esteem (RSES)	27.52	3.11	17-35	-.30
Emotional abuse (EAQ)	45.42	15.19	27-107	1.05

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation. The reported range of the RAS needs to be checked with the scoring criteria for the instrument administered.

Descriptive statistics and distributional characteristics of age and three main study variables are shown in Table 1. The mean age of participants was 35.12 years ($SD = 9.83$). The reported mean scores were 24.81 ($SD = 5.26$) for relationship satisfaction, 27.52 ($SD = 3.11$) for self-esteem, and 45.42 ($SD = 15.19$) for emotional abuse. Satisfaction with the relationship had a significant positive skew and kurtosis, which warrant further discussion of the distribution and assumptions for future analyses.

Table II: Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Relationship Satisfaction	—				
2. Self-Esteem	.003	—			
3. Emotional Abuse	-.389**	.215**	—		
4. Working Hours	.019	-.102	-.075	—	
5. Duration of marriage	.037	-.203**	-.127	-.065	—

** $p < .01$

The Pearson product-moment correlations were investigated between the main study variables and working hours and duration of marriage. The results are shown in Table 2. The relationship with emotional abuse was significantly negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction, $r = -.389$, $p < .001$. So, the greater the reported level of emotional abuse, the lower the level of reported relationship satisfaction. There was a positive correlation between emotional abuse and self-esteem ($r = .215$, $p = .002$). This was opposite to the negative relationship predicted. Before interpreting this result in a substantive manner, the direction of the scoring and data entry for the emotional abuse measure and RSES should be checked. There was no significant statistical relationship between self-esteem and relationship satisfaction, $r = .003$, $p = .965$. Thus, the reported correlation did not support Hypothesis 3. Self-esteem and the duration of marriage were significantly negatively correlated, $r = -.203$, $p = .004$, while the duration of marriage was not significantly correlated with emotional abuse and relationship satisfaction. There was no significant correlation between working hours and the three main study variables.

Table III: One-Way Analyses of Variance for Emotional Abuse and Relationship Satisfaction Across Working-Hour Groups (N = 200)

Outcome	Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Emotional Abuse	Between groups	1,604.478	6	267.413	1.165	.326
	Within groups	44,282.242	193	229.442	—	—
	Total	45,886.720	199	—	—	—
Relationship Satisfaction	Between groups	75.976	6	12.663	0.451	.844
	Within groups	5,421.419	193	28.090	—	—
	Total	5,497.395	199	—	—	—

Note. Degrees of freedom are based on the supplied sums of squares and mean squares.

To determine whether emotional abuse and relationship satisfaction differed by the groups of working hours, one-way analyses of variance were performed. The results of these are shown in Table 3. The analysis did not reveal statistically significant differences in emotional abuse across working-hour groups, $F(6, 193) = 1.165$, $p = .326$.

Relationship satisfaction also did not differ significantly across working-hour groups, $F(6, 193) = 0.451, p = .844$. These findings did not support the proposed group differences for these outcomes.

Mediation Analysis

The proposed mediation model consisted of an examination of whether there was a statistical mediation effect for the self-esteem variable in the relationship between emotional abuse and marital relationship satisfaction. But the regression coefficients for the predictor-to-mediator path, the mediator-to-outcome path, and the bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect were not provided in the available results. Correlations, however, were not enough to support mediation, as emotional abuse was strongly related to relationship satisfaction. In addition, self-esteem was not significantly correlated to the satisfaction of the relationships ($r = .003, p = .965$). This explanation is not consistent with the presumed simple association, but the indirect effect will need to be assessed using the full mediation output. Therefore, it is difficult to confirm from the currently available statistics the role of self-esteem as a mediator of the relationship. When reporting the conclusion for Hypothesis 4, the PROCESS output (indirect effect and bootstrap confidence interval) is needed.

IV. DISCUSSION

Marriage is not viewed as demeaning and the present study aimed to explore connections between emotional abuse, self-esteem and marital relationship satisfaction among working women from Pakistan. The results support the possible relationship between emotional abuse and satisfaction of the relationship, but failed to validate the theory of self-esteem as a mediator. The negative correlation between emotional abuse and relationship satisfaction showed that those who indicated greater emotional abuse levels tended to have lower levels of relationship satisfaction. This is congruent with the idea that continued criticism, humiliation, manipulation, and controlling are linked to less positive views of a marriage relationship. But the correlational design does not allow you to determine the direction of influence or infer other explanations. The relationship between self-esteem and emotional abuse was in the opposite direction to what was predicted, being positive. The finding is not to be read as an endorsement of the notion that emotional abuse enhances self-esteem. Result does not provide enough information to infer possible explanations. The directions for the emotional abuse measure, the item coding, the direction of the scoring procedure, as well as the data entry for the measure should be verified first. Once all these tests are done, the outcome should be talked about clearly and in light of relevant literature.

The correlation analysis did not show a significant relationship between self-esteem and relationship satisfaction. So, the positive relationship expected was not confirmed. The proposed theoretical pathway is also in need of further investigation on this finding. The complete mediation model should be tested prior to checking for statistical mediation via self-esteem. There were no significant differences between working-hour groups in emotional abuse or satisfaction with relationships. These non-significant findings result from finding no statistically significant group differences in the analyses. They should not be taken as evidence that there is no link between marital features and occupational characteristics in particular populations. There was a negative association between duration of marriage and self-esteem. This association may be worthy of further investigation, but the cross-sectional data does not account for the reasons for this association. Other factors and prospective studies may shed light on whether this relationship is seen across various populations and situations.

V. CONCLUSION

The current study explored the relationship between emotional abuse and marital relationship satisfaction among married working women in Pakistan which was mediated by self-esteem. The results showed that emotional abuse was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. The positive relationship between emotional abuse and self-esteem, however, was in the opposite direction to that expected, and self-esteem did not significantly relate to relationship satisfaction. The findings available, however, do not confirm the proposed mediating role of self-esteem. Before the manuscript is finished, the instrument scoring, instrument identification should be confirmed and the total mediation analysis should be presented. With these checks in mind the study can help in

understanding the psychological and interpersonal factors that are linked to marital relationship satisfaction among working married women in Pakistan.

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