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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MARITAL ADJUSTMENT AMONG MIDDLE AGED COUPLES DURING COVID 19

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ABSTRACT

The body tape cities The aim of the study is to analyse the adjust mental differences occurred in the marital life among middle aged couples during COVID-19. The size of the sample was 338 middle aged adults, including females (N=283) and males (N=82) . Convenient sampling method was used to select participants. Questionnaire method was used to collect data. Marital Adjustment questionnaire (Kumar and Rohatgi, 1976) was used to assess marital adjustment and self developed personal data sheet was used to collect personal information. Data was entered and analysed through SPSS version 25. Study found that age, gender, and duration of marital life years do not influence the marital adjustment of middle aged couples.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic has triggered marital issues and altered the bond and structure of their relationship. Pandemic has forced families into lockdowns and it has changed relationship quality very differently. Pandemic has put marriages under significant pressure as couples struggle to navigate lack of privacy, professional worries. The entire lifestyle of couple altered and the pandemic hit hard the human lives, taken lives of hundreds and thousands, economic status deployed and it directly affect the daily routine of family life. These effects vary by relationships. Lockdown forced the women and men out of work and started work from home. Thus the increased rate of unemployment made unstable economic conditions. Economic disruptions created more stress among working class and poor class. Staying longer time in home helped couple to understand each other better. Too much togetherness, lack of personal space created new problems and enlarged already existing problems (Hood, 2020). COVID has increased the stress in their marital life and divorce rates have increased. According to Wilcox, Stone, and Wang (2020) the pandemic has raised a tough situation, people turn toward family for support and deepened their commitment towards marital life. People started to enjoy the change from busy life to a confinement together. Pandemic may shape a relationship both dark and light such as rates of divorce, marriage, and birth. Pandemics created a form of stress that distorts couples and families and will severely affect the foundations of relationship.

All the above factors create internal stressors among couple's relationship. The study of Bodemann *et al.*(2015) revealed the importance of external stressors in the smooth functioning of marital life. They found that the presence of external stressors such as unemployment, economic hardship, and work stress create various types of difficulties in the fulfilment of each other's needs. When faced with external stress, individuals are more likely to communicate in ways that are overly critical or argumentative. They also tend to blame their partner and have more difficulty listening to their partner's concerns and taking their partner's perspective. Over time, they can become less satisfied with their partner and their relationship (Bodenmann *et al.*, 2015). Income is another influencing factor in marital life. Poor and lower income is at higher risk of marital dissolutions. Staying in home disrupts couples' and families' routines (Neff & Karney, 2017). According to Maiti, Singh, inamuri and Hasija (2020) a word that has grown with immense popularity with the advent of COVID-19 is 'social distancing', a word that WHO later urged to replace with „physical distancing'. As social animals, disconnecting with others can have several repercussions, both on emotional and physical well-being. However, with no available cure, and a significant percentage of asymptomatic individuals affected with COVID-19, separation through quarantine , isolation was strictly suggested and enforced. A sudden declaration of a national-wide lockdown resulted in both the physical and emotional distance creating a 'pseudo-long-distance relationship', especially for couples stuck in different places. On the other side of the coin, some couples temporarily use distancing from one another after an altercation to resolve a conflict.

A lockdown would not allow their usual coping strategy of temporary separation and could worsen their conflicts further. Even couples staying together would be experiencing excessive anxiety of spreading the disease to each other and associated guilt of the same. Additionally, there was stigma especially towards health care workers and other vulnerable individuals. As testing, alcohol rubs, and masks were available in limited supply and protective measures advised are very general, there was perhaps more confusion and disagreements about these preventive measures. The lockdown restrictions were changed with the different phases of lockdown, and it demanding different and frequent adjustments. In other sense, spending more time in home leads to increased communication, emotional and physical closeness, security and comfort. Thus lockdown promoted the level of mutual understanding and it may cause the reduction of divorce rate. Partners got enough time to understand more about the needs and concerns of each other and intimacy can make their relationship happy and enjoyable. Couples who utilize this opportunity for their growth is an act of investment in emotional and physical health of partners (Bodemann *et al.*, 2020). According to Walsh and Stephenson (2021) the odds of increased relationship investment was significantly associated with pandemic-related employment change and employment change leads to increased relationship happiness and increased sex during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has called upon couples to spend extended amounts of time together and rely primarily on each other for support during a major stressor that has upended nearly every aspect of daily life. The mortality rate also influenced the couple's relationship. The high mortality rates of COVID-19 pandemic promoting higher level of couple relationship, emotional and physical supports (Biddle *et al.*, 2020). The results of the study of Williamson (2020), indicated that average people did not change in their relationships, but became more forgiving and less blaming of their partner's negative behaviours by attributing them less to their partner's internal characteristics. Individuals who engaged in positive coping efforts were able to avoid conflict with their partner during pandemic and experienced a small increase in relationship satisfaction.

Marital relationship is positively or negatively influenced by various external or internal factors. Pandemic period is directly influencing their relationships. Lockdown, work at home, isolation and increased mortality rates affect the harmonious marital relationships. Positive and negative contributions of COVID-19 helped to hike the rate of marital disharmony as well as strengthening couples relationships. They were detached from their children and lockdown add fuel to their mental agony. But on the other side, the absence of socialization and other restrictions of lockdown strengthen the mutual understanding and relationship. The Association of Psychological Science (2020) reported that couples will face multiple challenges and situations from covid-19 pandemic and its effects will not distort the relationship always and may grow even more stronger as intimacy develops while spending time together. Present study focused to find out any serious influence of COVID 19 restrictions upon the marital adjustment of middle aged couples.

Objectives

- To find out whether there is any gender difference in marital adjustment among middle aged couples.
- To find out whether there is any significant difference in marital adjustment among middle aged couples categorized on the basis of age.
- To find out whether there is any difference in marital adjustment among middle aged couples categorized on their duration of marital life.

Hypotheses

- 1 There will be significant gender difference in marital adjustment among middle aged couples.
- 2 There will be significant difference in marital adjustment among middle aged couples categorized on the basis of age.

- 3 There will be significant difference in marital adjustment among middle aged couples categorized on duration of marital life.

METHODS

In this study researcher used descriptive research design. The sample consisted of 338 middle aged. The researcher used questionnaire method to collect data. The researcher collected data through Google forms. Instructions were given according to the manual.

Instruments

- *Demographic data sheet*: A demographic data sheet was used in addition seek personal details such as gender, age, marital status, occupation.
- *Marital adjustment questionnaire*: Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (MAQ) by Kumar and Rohatgi (1976). The Marital Adjustment Questionnaire in its final form consists of 25 highly discriminating „Yes – No“ type items.

Marital adjustment is a standardized tool and the split-half reliability, correlating odd even items, applying the Spearman-Brown formula for doubling the test length, was found to be 0.49 (N=60) with an index of reliability of 0.70. The test-retest reliability was also studied. It was found to be .71 (N=60) with an index of reliability of 0.84. The face validity of the questionnaire appeared to be fairly high. The questionnaire was also validated against Singh's Marital Adjustment Inventory (Singh, 1972).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The table shows that there is no significant gender difference in marital adjustment. The mean of males is greater than mean of females in marital adjustment. But the difference is not statistically significant. It may be due to both of the spouses jointly confronted the same situation and easily adapted to the circumstances.

Table No 1. The mean of SD and corresponding "t" value of marital adjustment based on gender

Variable	Mean of males (N=253)	SD	Mean of females (N=82)	SD	„t“ value
Marital Adjustment	38.27	6.70	38.74	7.03	0.546

Work from home created staying longer time in home and spending more time with spouse created a progress in togetherness, and support. In the case of marital adjustment, it may be intact in adverse situation too, beyond their sex difference. According to the study of Goel and Narang (2012) no significant differences were found in marital adjustment of males and females of middle aged. It was seen that Females showed high level of recreational adjustment as compared to males but males were having better group oriented attitude than females. Further they found that human beings constantly have to adjust to various roles, environmental demands and pressures during the pandemic also. Throughout the course of life, human beings strive for well-being and happiness in various spheres of life - personal, social, economic, marital and work irrespective of gender difference. Mental health is an important component of marital adjustment and mentally healthy persons have certain qualities. It is clearly indicated in the study of Nema (2013). They found that males are more mentally healthy than females. A balance of psychic forces in the males shows sound mental health. Ability to understand and to share other people's emotions, the ability to concentrate at work and interest in several activities in middle aged males results in good adjustment with spouse and with the family members. They always have an inner feeling to spend quality time with their spouse, take care of and satisfy sexual needs of the partner. They have concern and feel responsible for needs of the family members and for smooth functioning of the family, they are able to make equal role distribution among the family members.

They try to maintain balance between family and society. During middle age the males have less family responsibilities (as the children are grown up or settled down) and would also desire to spend some time for social work or welfare activities. It leads to their overall life satisfaction. In addition to the above factors prolonged togetherness and interactional time also influenced the marital adjustment. The study of Lasswell (1982) is an example. The lifestyles of spouses also affected the marital adjustment (Mukerjee, 1990).

Table 2. ANOVA of marital adjustment based on their age group

Variable		Sum Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Marital Adjustment	Between Group	56.055	5	11.211	.240
	Within Group	15510.75	332	46.719	
	Total	15566.805	337		

There is no significant difference was observed in marital adjustment based on their age group. The F value of marital adjustment is lower than the table value. Due to increased coping ability and life skill, middle aged is able to adjust with their problems related to marital life even in the pandemic. Thus marital adjustment is similar among different age groups of sample because environment is favourable among different age groups of middle aged couples. In other words middle aged people have more exposures from life situations and it helps to adapted well to the marital life. Thus, the hypothesis - there will be significant difference in marital adjustment based on their age group - is rejected. The findings of the study of Nema (2013) indicated that the relationships between discrete emotion sequences and marital satisfaction did not consistently differ as a function of age, but when they did, they tended to be stronger for older couples. This study revealed important differences in how discrete emotion sequences relate to marital satisfaction.

Table 3. ANOVA with respect to duration of marital life

Variable		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Marital Adjustment	Between Groups	59.16	3	19.732	.425
	Within Groups	15507.805	334	45.430	
	Total	15566.805	337		

There is no significant difference in marital adjustment based on duration of marital life. The F value of marital adjustment is lower than the table value, which means that duration of marital life did not influenced the marital adjustment. Many findings of various researchers contradicted with present findings. According to Ningsih and Herawati (2017) age being married will affect a person's maturity in running a household. The study of Hirschberger, Srivastava, Marsh, Cowan, and Cowan (2009) is an example. According to them marital satisfaction declined over 15 years for both husbands and wives. Many married individuals experienced significant changes in their lives after they become parents, including identity changes, shifting roles in the marriage and outside the family, and changes in the relationship with their own parents. The researchers found that various factors such as age, income, and education. Marital difficulties occur early in marriage. The consequences for individuals and their families affect emotional well-being, financial stability, and child development. Interpersonal trust, desired spousal behavior change, and emotional maturity are highly associated with marital adjustment (Quinn & Odell, 2008)

CONCLUSION

The major focus of this study is to assess whether COVID-19 has influenced marital relationship. Marital adjustment is similar among males and females, higher and lower age groups of middle aged couples. Pandemic period may positively influenced and helped to strengthen marital adjustment more and without any change than before.

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