ORIGINAL ARTICLE

PERCEIVED STRESS, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, COPING STRATEGIES, AND MARITAL ADJUSTMENT IN DUAL EARNER COUPLES

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Background: It has often been experiential that dual earner couples with the passage of time become more frustrated and strict due to lots of burden and that may affect their marital life too. The Present study aimed to investigate the relationship among Perceived Stress, Emotional Intelligence, Coping Strategies and Marital Adjustment in Dual Earner Couples. **Method:** This was a cross sectional study conducted on the sample of 75 dual earner couples (n=150) with the age range of 25–45 was selected by using the Non-Probability Purposive Technique. Data was taken from different Govt. and Private Institutes of Lahore. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), Brief COPE Inventory (BCOPEI) and Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) were applied on the participants along with demographic questionnaire. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, Multiple Regression analysis and Independent Sample *t*-test was used in the study. **Results:** The Results showed that there was a significant negative correlation between Perceived Stress and marital adjustment ($r= -0.25$, $p=0.001$), whereas, Emotional Intelligence ($r=0.46$, $p=0.000$) and Coping Strategies ($r=0.15$, $p=0.033$) have significant positive relationship with Marital Adjustment. Perceived Stress ($p=0.23$) and Coping Strategies ($p=0.92$) are not well predictors; however Emotional Intelligence ($p=0.000$) was found a significant predictor of Marital Adjustment ($R^2=0.22$). The findings also depicted that there was no gender difference regarding the study variables. **Conclusion:** Perceived stress has negative but emotional intelligence and coping strategies have positive effect on marital adjustment.

Keywords: Perceived stress, Emotional intelligence, Coping strategies, Marital adjustment, Dual earner couples

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a lifetime commitment with a person, built upon loyalty, mutual trust, assistance, love, enthusiasm, and understanding. Argument between the needs and demands of the partners forced by the surroundings often direct the problems to adjustment in their relationship.[1] Adjustment in marital life is taken as the method of adaptation between the spouses, which is happened in a gradual way throughout the marital life. Marital adjustment manipulates the numerous features of a person and human society like qualities, work tensions, psychological well-being, sadness, qualification, sexual contentment, manners, pleasure and achievement in the lifetime.[2]

Due to their jobs couples can't pay proper attention to their marital duties and in turn their family life suffers. In societies like Pakistan, family is the basic unit because collectivistic culture system exists here and a disturbed married life will direct to a distress society. Lack of sacrifice, forced marriages, insatiability, combined family system, and distinction in social status seems to be the major reasons for the increased separations.[3] There is an integral need to observe the positive effect of Emotional Intelligence and managing skills up to marital adjustment which will help couple to direct a happy and well-adjusted married life.

Perceived Stress is defined as, 'a process in which environmental hassle exceeds the adaptive capability of an organism, resulting in psychological and biological changes that may place persons at risk for disease'.[4] Stress is a notion that has gained a huge attention in marital studies during the last decade, showing that it plays a significant role in considering the quality and solidity of close relationship. Many studies suggest that constant worry could be a threat to the quality of marital life and its durability. Dual earner couples are highly mutually dependent. So, the perception of stress by the husband or better half not only have an impact on his/her own marital adjustment but also on their partner's matrimonial value.[5]

Emotional Intelligence is an important part of social development and it adds the value to interpersonal relationship.[6] Emotional Intelligence was taken as the capacity to observe, comprehend and control the emotions. The complete intelligence of emotions is importantly associated with happiness of the married couple. Hence, in a marital bond, Emotional Intelligence is exhibited as well as exercised when the two of partners are conscious of their person's emotions and they deal with them in a good way and pay attention to the feelings of their spouse.[7]

Coping is an attempt by a person to solve life stressor and emotional pain.[8] Stress was recognized as maximizing the chances of separation, ultimately producing low association status. Like a tensed spouse may carry his/her stress at the house, that may impact the other partner negatively.[9] Marital adjustment provide an exclusive chance for the investigators to read coping attempts with prospecting a close relationship having arguments and handling them. Skills of coping are often bonded with the concept of adjusting marriage. Dissatisfaction in a wedding is caused by the removal of Coping ways while the contentment in a marriage is due to presence of approach based coping strategies.[10] The aim of this study was to find out the relationship among perceived stress, emotional intelligence, coping strategies and marital adjustment in dual earner couples and explore the gender difference in study variables.

METHODOLOGY

The present research was a cross-sectional with correlation research design and this was approved by Ethical Committee of Riphah Institute of Clinical and Professional Psychology. Non-probability purposive sampling approach was done to enlist the sample. The sample size was calculated through the G-power analysis with 95% confidence interval, 50% error of margin, and 50% response distribution. The participants (n=150) of this study include 75 husbands and 75 wives dual earner couples. The data was collected from different Government and private institutes of Lahore City, Pakistan.

The inclusion criteria of the study were ages of the couples between 25 and 45 years, both partners employed, dual earner couples living together and had passed at least one year of marriage. All those couples who had previous history of divorce and with any serious medical or psychological illness were excluded from the study. The couples having any child with disability were also not included in the study.

The demographic information of participants was obtained through a questionnaire. Perceived Stress Scale[11] (PSS) was used to calculate the level of stressed circumstances in an individual's past month. This scale contains the 14 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0=never, 1=Almost Never, 2=Sometimes, 3=Fairly Often, 4=Very Often). The scores of PSS are achieved through the reverse scoring procedure on the items. Items 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 13 are the positive stated items. Coefficient alpha reliability for PSS has ranged from 0.84 to point 0.86. Urdu version of PSS[12] was used in the study, with alpha coefficient 0.64.

Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test[6] (SSEIT) is based on 33 items. Participants respond to each item using a 5-point scale, including 1 as 'strongly disagree', 2 as 'disagree', 3 as 'undecided', 4 as 'agree', and 5 as 'strongly agree'. Total scores are calculated by reverse coding items 5, 28, and 33 and then summing all items. Scores can range from 33 to 165 with higher scores indicating more characteristic of emotional intelligence. The authors reported two-week test-retest reliability at 0.78 and alpha co-efficient reliability was 0.87. The current study used The Urdu adaptation of this test with reliability coefficient 0.89.[13]

The Brief COPE Inventory[14] (BCOPEI) has 28 statements that evaluate the tendency in which an individual employs various coping techniques. This inventory based on 4-points Likert ranging from 1, 'I haven't been doing this at all' to 4, 'I've been doing this a lot'. Higher score symbolizes the greater extent of coping strategies. This inventory contains the reliability of 0.96. The alpha reliability of Urdu version is 0.82.[15]

Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale[16] (RDAS) consists of 14 items on which the participants appraise his/her adjustment on a 5-point Likert scale 0.48 are the cut-off score which explained that the score of 48 or above highlighted the highest level of marital adjustment and below score show lowest marital adjustment. The RADS have the excellent degree of reliability which is 0.90. Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale was translated into Urdu for present study, with alpha coefficient 0.84.

Formal permission was granted from the original authors to use and translate the measures. Permission was also taken from the authors who adapted the PSS, SSEIT and BCOPEI into Urdu. For this study, Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale was translated into Urdu by follow the MAPI guidelines. The data was collected, after getting the approval from the heads of Government and private institutes of Lahore city of Pakistan. The nature and the purpose of the study was described to the couples and ensured that all the collected information was kept confidential. Written informed consent was taken from the participants. All scales were individually administered to each participant.

Data were entered and analysed on SPSS-21. The Descriptive Statistics were used to enlighten the demographic variables of the research. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis was carried out to observe the relationship among perceived stress, emotional intelligence, coping strategies and marital adjustment in dual earner couples. Multiple regression analysis was done for prediction about these conducted variables among dual earner couples. Independent sample t-test was performed to appraise the gender differences in study variables, and $p \leq 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

In total 150 cases, there were 75 (50%) husbands and 75 (50%) wives selected with the age range 25–45 years.

Table-1 represents the descriptive statistics of demographic variables of the participants.

Table-1: Frequency and percentage of the demographic variables of the participants (n=150)

Demographics variables	Frequency	Percentage
Education		
Intermediate	12	8.0
Graduate	32	21.3
Masters	87	58.0
M. Phil	15	10.0
PhD	4	2.7
Profession		
Government Jobs	38	25.3
Private Jobs	112	74.4
Job Nature		
Full Time	142	97.4
Part Time	8	5.3
Monthly Income		
20,000–50,000	98	65.3
51,000–80,000	52	34.7
No. of Dependents		
1–5	93	62.0
6–10	57	38.0
Family System		
Nuclear	64	42.7
Joint	86	57.3
Social Status		
Upper Class	33	22.0
Middle Class	117	78.0
Marriage Duration		
1–3	14	9.3
4–6	56	37.3
7–9	60	40.0
10–12	20	13.3
No. of Children		
One Child	39	26.0
Two Children	45	30.5
Three Children	42	28.3
Four Children	16	11.0
Five Children	8	4.2
Psychological Disorder		
No	150	100
Physical Disorder		
No	150	100

Correlations analysis (Table-2) depicted a significant negative correlation between perceived stress and marital adjustment ($p=0.001$). Perceived stress also had the significant negative relationship with emotional intelligence ($p=0.000$). Findings also indicated that the emotional intelligence has highly significant positive correlation with coping strategies ($p=0.000$) and dyadic adjustment ($p=0.000$). Moreover, coping strategies had significant positive relationship with marital adjustment ($p=0.033$).

Table-3 shows the multiple regression analysis for the prediction of marital adjustment. The regression model illustrated 21% variance in marital adjustment $F_{(3, 146)}=14.348$, $p=0.000$. The results of multiple regression analysis demonstrated that perceived stress ($p=0.23$) and coping strategies ($p=0.92$) do not predict marital adjustment but Emotional Intelligence predicts the marital adjustment ($p=0.000$).

Independent sample t-test is discussed in Table-4 and the results reveal that both the husbands and wives were not significantly different regarding perceived stress ($p=0.50$), emotional intelligence ($p=0.39$), coping strategies ($p=0.14$) and marital adjustment ($p=0.03$). The effect size ($d=0.1$) confirmed a trivial effect size for gender with respect to perceived stress, emotional intelligence and marital adjustment. Effect size ($d=0.2$) in relation to coping strategies illustrated that there is small gender effect size.

Table-2: Correlations between perceived stress, emotional intelligence, coping strategies and marital adjustment

Measures	PSS	SSEIT	BCOP	RDAS
PSS		-0.36**	0.01	-0.25**
SSEIT			0.36**	0.46**
BCOPI				0.15*
RDAS				

*$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$, PSS=Perceived Stress Scale, SSEIT=Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test, BCOPI=Brief Cop Inventory, RDAS=Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale

Table-3: Multiple regression analysis where the predictors perceived stress, emotional intelligence, coping strategies and outcome variable that was marital adjustment

Variables	Marital Adjustment		
	B	SE	β
PSS	-0.12	0.10	-0.09
SSEIT	0.26	0.05	0.43*
BCOPI	-0.006	0.06	-0.00

*$p<0.01$, PSS=Perceived Stress Scale, SSEIT=Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test, BCOPI=Brief Cop Inventory, RDAS=Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale, R=0.477, R2=0.22, ΔR2=0.21, SE=Standard Error

Table-4: Gender difference regarding perceived stress, emotional intelligence, coping strategies and marital adjustment (n=150)

Measures	Male (n=75) Mean±SD	Female (n=75) Mean±(SD)	t	Df	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
						LL	UL	
PSS	20.56±7.40	21.34±7.10	-0.66	148	0.50	-3.12	1.55	0.10
SSEIT	130.14±15.53	127.98±15.40	0.85	148	0.39	-2.83	7.15	0.13
BCOPI	69.77±11.22	72.41±11.05	-1.45	148	0.14	-6.23	0.95	0.23
RDAS	55.17±9.80	53.57±9.13	1.03	148	0.30	-1.4	4.65	0.16

CI=confidence interval, LL=lower limit, UL=upper limit, PSS=Perceived Stress Scale, SSEIT=Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test, BCOPI=Brief Cop Inventory, RDAS=Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale

DISCUSSION

Findings of the present study depicted that there was a significant negative relationship between perceived stress and marital adjustment. Results also revealed that emotional intelligence and coping strategies have significant positive relationship with marital adjustment. These results are line up with the existing literature. One study that explain the link between perceived stress and adjustment of marriage, suggested that Couples that perceived their lives tensed may add problems to couples' relationship.[17] There was another study based on emotional intelligence and marital adjustment, stated that there was a highly significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and marital adjustment.[18] Furthermore, a study illustrates the relationship between coping strategies and marital adjustment concluded that, coping skills had a positive connection with the adjustment of marriage of dual earner couples.[19]

The current research also concluded that perceived stress and coping strategies not considered a good predictor for marital adjustment but the emotional intelligence considered a strong predictor of wedding adjustment. It was seen that perceived stress did not forecast the marital quality; this might be due to the fact of cultural differences or Due to having a better understanding the emotions of others, dual earner couples do not let the perceive stress to have an effect on their married life. Furthermore, Empirical evidence confirmed that coping style is not a good predictor of spouse adjustment.[20] Another study investigated the role of Emotional Intelligence in the forecast of marital quality of the dual earner spouses. Consequences of their study explained that Emotional Intelligence was positively considerable in the prediction of marital quality.[21]

The results of Student's *t*-test analysis indicated that husbands and wives were not significantly different regarding the study variables. These results are accordance with the previous literature regarding perceived stress, emotional intelligence, coping strategies and marital adjustment. One study which was regarding to perceive stress concluded that husbands and wives did not behave differently in the perception of stress.[22] Moreover, the research regarding emotional intelligence and marital adjustment, reported that male and female are the same in emotional intelligence and they also enlightened that both gender had equal value on marital adjustment scale.[23] In addition, one study related to coping strategy, explained that husbands and wives are equal in their coping mechanism.[24]

The research has partial generalize ability because of that the data collection was done only from the city of Lahore, Pakistan. So, in future the researcher should select the data from all the cities of a country. A further limitation might be that demographic variables have the greater importance in perceived stress, emotional intelligence, coping strategies and marital adjustment. Consequently, future researchers must consider the demographic variables in studying perceived stress, emotional intelligence, coping strategies and marital adjustment.

CONCLUSION

Perceived stress displayed the negative effect on marital adjustment whereas emotional intelligence and coping strategies have positive impact on marital adjustment of dual earner couples. The husbands and wives were not significantly different regarding the study variables.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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