

Impact of Communication Patterns and Relationship Dissatisfaction on Emotional Distress among Married Individuals

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Abstract

Background. Marriage satisfaction is a crucial component of numerous people's lives and has been linked to greater life satisfaction as well as the psychological health of married people in Pakistan. The purpose of this research study was to find out the impact of different communication patterns and relationship dissatisfaction on emotional distress among married individuals.

Methods. A cross-sectional study was conducted in which sample of the present study consisted of (N=226, M=1.35, SD=.48) married individuals (n=148 males and n=78 females) from Islamabad. Survey method was used to collect the data. Purposive sampling technique was used for selecting the sample. Perceived Emotional Distress Inventory (PEDI), Communication Pattern Questionnaire (CPQ) and Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI) were administered to married individuals.

Results. The findings demonstrated that relationship dissatisfaction, self-demand/partner withdraw, and partner demand/self-withdraw communication patterns are all highly significant predictors of emotional distress, and that among married people, constructive communication pattern is a negative predictor of emotional distress.

Conclusion. Effective communication often acts as a protective barrier against emotional suffering in married couples. When couples honestly and actively listen to one another, they are better able to understand and feel more connected to one another. This can lead to a more helpful and harmonic connection, which reduces the likelihood of emotional suffering.

Keywords. Emotional distress, constructive communication pattern, self-demand/partner withdraw, partner demand/self-withdraw communication patterns, relationship dissatisfaction.



Introduction

Family formation starts with marriage. In a marriage, two people meet each other's psychological, physical, and emotional needs. It is a sophisticated, sensitive, shared, sympathetic, and complex partnership. According to Guerrero et al. (2011) marriage has a substantial influence on how we currently define a meaningful and rich existence. The ability to comprehend and empathize with your partner's experiences, pay attention to their point of view, and be aware of and sensitive to their needs are all important communication patterns in a close relationship (Wasylikiw et al., 2010).

Communication is essential to a partnership; without it, a husband and wife cannot have a connection (Guerrero et al., 2011). According to Gottman (1998), unhappy married couples tend to communicate negatively more frequently. In contrast to constructive communication, which has a good emotional impact on married individuals, unfavorable communication was defined in the study as communication that has a negative emotional impact. However, not all negative communication tends to predict the dissolution of a marriage; rather, only those interactions that exhibit the four apocalyptic horsemen disapproval, defensiveness, disrespect, and withdrawal have been linked to this phenomenon (Arunachalam & Doohan, 2013; Driver & Gottman, 2004).

When assessing the effects of a relationship, communication quality is crucial. Demand-withdraw communication patterns are associated with situations where one partner contacts the other about an issue while the other person attempts to avoid the conversation (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 1999). According to Klinetob and Smith (1996) and Kluwer et al. (1998) this classification typically occurs when a partner becomes irritated and feels that the marriage is not working, so they try to change the subject or minimize the disagreement. Study also described that females are most likely to desire for change and males are most likely to withdraw because in marital relationship females face more inequality than males (Heena et al., 2007). In particular, wife demand/husband withdraw seems to be highly connected with distress in a relationship,

this is also reported that withdrawal patterns in either the husband or wife are related to distress in marital relationship (Stanley et al., 2002).

Smith et al. (2008) state that a distinct sense of contentment, pleasure, and approval that one spouse feels for the other is what they refer to as marital happiness. A person's physical and mental health can be affected by ineffective interactions (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Abbas et al. (2018) found a negative link between marital satisfaction and anxiety and depression in people who were married. The study focused on stress, anxiety, depression, and marital satisfaction among Pakistani women who were not employed. Because of this strong correlation, researchers discovered that people who are happily married had a ten-fold lower chance of exhibiting depressive symptoms than people who are experiencing marital problems. Marital problems like separation, other marital stresses, and divorce have been shown to commonly cause severe emotional distress (Swindle et al., 2000).

Regardless of society, the marriage partnership is the most important relationship in a person's life. Sternberg (2006) argues that intimacy, desire, and commitment are the cornerstones of a marriage. According to Thompson-Hayes and Webb (2008), these foundations are used to convey both verbal and nonverbal messages. This desire for bonding is satisfied not just by the marriage link but also by a close, trustworthy relationship in which married individuals show love and concern for one another (Compton, 2005; Baumgardner & Crothers, 2014; Hindman, 2015). Married couples with high levels of marital satisfaction report reduced stress levels, stronger social support levels, and an improved capacity to deal with subpar living situations (Canel, 2013; Shoko, 2011). Research indicates that in South Africa, married women are treated with greater humaneness than single, divorced, or widowed women. Personal well-being and physical health are positively correlated with marital happiness as well (Shoko, 2011). Research has shown that marital issues both cause and result in depression (Rehman & Munroe, 2006). Put another way, several studies have suggested that

marital dissatisfaction causes symptoms of depression (Beach & O'Leary, 1993). There is probably a reciprocal relationship between relationship satisfaction and depression (Whisman, 2001).

Hashmi et al. (2007) found a substantial correlation between emotional distress and marital satisfaction. Communication patterns are regarded to be the main factor impacting a married couple's relationship quality, and they also predict marital emotional pain. Communication patterns are specific modes of communicating that one spouse supports in an attempt to encourage or help the other, and they are also linked to expectations of better levels of marital pleasure (Bradbury et al., 2000; Sullivan et al., 2010). Sadly, not many research have examined the association between relationship dissatisfaction and these three communication styles, as well as how they impact emotional discomfort in Pakistan. New research on emotional distress, relationship unhappiness, and communication styles in Pakistan may have a big impact on people's lives and society as a whole. Developing specialized treatments and support networks can be aided by an understanding of these processes. It may also function as a resource for culturally aware therapeutic approaches that improve mental health and positive interpersonal interactions within Pakistani society. Furthermore, studies of this kind can increase awareness, dispel stigma, and encourage candid conversations about mental health all of which can enhance interpersonal connections and the general well-being of society.

Objectives

1. To assess the impact of constructive communication pattern, self-demand/partner withdraw communication pattern, partner demand/self-withdraw communication pattern and relationship dissatisfaction on emotional distress among married individuals.

Hypotheses

1. Constructive communication pattern is a negative predictor of emotional distress among married individuals.
2. Self-Demand/ partner withdraw Communication pattern positively predict emotional distress among married individuals.
3. Partner demand/ self-withdraw communication pattern positively predict emotional distress among married individuals.
4. Relationship dissatisfaction is a positive predictor of emotional distress among married individuals.

Method

Sample

The sample of the current study consisted of husbands and wives from Islamabad city. The standards parameter Solvins formula was used for study sample collection. The formula of the study was $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$. The initial sample consisted of 250 participants but 24 data forms were incomplete so after elimination of these forms sample of the study included ($N=226$, $M=1.35$, $SD=.48$) participants ($n=148$ males and $n=78$ females). Purposive sampling technique have been used for selecting the sample. The demographic factors that defined the sample included age, gender, socioeconomic status, number of years married, age gap between spouses, number of children, and joint/nuclear family structure. The participants were at least a year into their marriage. The subjects of the study were heterosexual individuals who had been formally wedded as husband and wife by the state. Excluded were those who had separated or divorced from their partners. Married individuals with professional diagnoses of anxiety and depression were not included in the study.

Table 1*Frequency and Percentage of Demographics Variable of Study (N=226)*

Demographic Variables	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Age		
Early adulthood (19-35)	81	35.8
Middle adulthood (35-55)	101	44.6
Late adulthood (older than 55)	44	19.4
Gender		
Male	148	65.5
Female	78	34.5
Socio Economic Status		
Low	26	11.5
Middle	107	47.3
High	93	41.2
Number of children		
no children	93	41.2
1 – 3	97	42.9
4-6	36	15.9
Year of marriage		
less than 5 years	94	41.6
5 to 10 years	96	42.5
more than 10 years	36	15.9
Family system		
Joint	133	58.8
Nuclear	93	41.2
Age gap between couples		
less than 5 years	116	51.3
5-10 years	91	40.3
more than 10 years	19	8.4

Assessment Measures

Perceived Emotional Distress Inventory (PEDI). Perceived Emotional Distress Inventory (PEDI) was developed by Moscoso et al. (2012). It consists of 12 items self-report stems to predict the presence of emotional distress among married individuals. It has four subscales that are anxiety (4 items), anger (4 items), depression (2 items) and

hopelessness (2 items) recognizing the differences between expressing and repressing anger.

People rate how much they experienced each emotional distress-related symptom in the preceding month, "including today" (all the time), on a 5-point scale that goes from 0 (not at all) to 4. The inventory's overall score might be between 0 and 48 points. Higher scores reflect perceived emotional suffering at higher levels. The ratings for

each individual PEDI category are simply added up to produce a Global Severity Index raw scores (GSI). There are no cut-off scores for the PEDI because it is not a diagnostic tool. The instrument's developer wanted to compare the participants in the study samples because the tool was only intended to be used for research. The PEDI elements should be regarded as ordinal variables in terms of statistics. The reliability of the scale was $\alpha = 0.74$ which shows the scale was reliable to use for married individuals.

Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-32). Couple satisfaction index (CSI) was designed to assess one's satisfaction in a relationship (Funk & Rogge, 2007). It has 32 items. Comparing CSI-32 to other existing measures of marital satisfaction, it is thought to be more specific, accurate, and able to provide more information. Likert scales go from highly sad to extremely cheerful, with five points. There are 128 possible CSI-32 scores. Relationship satisfaction increases with a higher score, and relationship discontent is evident when the score is less than 84.5. The alpha reliability of the scale is high i.e. ($\alpha = .88$). CSI scales proved to be more than just a straightforward self-report measure after going through item-level analysis to assess the present level of precision. This proves that CSI only evaluates the level of satisfaction felt by married people who are in committed relationships.

Communication Pattern Questionnaire (CPQ). The CPQ is a 35-item self-report questionnaire designed to evaluate married people's coping mechanisms for marital problems (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984). The scale has five points, ranging from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 5 (highly likely). Constructive Communication (CC), Self-demand/Partner-withdraw (SDPW), and Partner-demand/Self-withdraw (PDSW) are

the three subscales that make up the scale. 10 Items that are included in constructive communication subscale are 2, 6, 8, 23, 25, 27, 1, 24, 25 and 26. Self-demand/ partner withdraw subscale included 13 item (3, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19,21, 28, 30, 32 and 34) and partner demand/ self-withdraw subscale included 13 items (4, 5, 10, 12, 14,16, 18, 20, 22, 29,31, 33 and 35). The alpha reliability of the scale is $\alpha = 0.78$ to use on married individuals.

Procedure

The quantitative study in which correlational predictive research designed was conducted to examine the impact of communication patterns and relationship dissatisfaction on emotional distress among married individuals for present research. A survey method were used to gather the data. The participants were individually approached at their respective places i.e. their homes and work places. There were (N=226, M= 1.35, SD=.48) married individuals (n=148 males and n=78 females) and they were selected following purposive sampling technique. Following obtaining their agreement, individuals were informed of the study's objectives and asked to participate by providing responses to all questions. They were told that the information they provided would be kept confidential and utilized exclusively for study. After that, SPSS was used to compute and analyze the data. The analysis was used to formulate the outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

The chairman of the institutes and the Ethical Review Board, Department of Psychology, IUI, Ethics Committee, all granted their ethical permission. The participants also gave their informed consent, which was verified in terms of the matters' confidentiality and privacy.

Results

Table 2

Linear Regression Analysis for Predicting Emotional Distress from Constructive Communication Pattern (N=226)

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>Model Emotional distress</i>
Constant	16.20	
Constructive communication	-.89	
<i>R</i> ²		.39
<i>F</i>		828.43***

Note. B = Coefficient of Regression, CI = Confidence interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit ****p* < .001
Upper Limit ****p* < .001

Table 2 shows linear regression among constructive communication pattern and emotional distress. The result indicated that constructive communication negatively predict emotional distress among married individuals (F=828.43, B= -.89, P<.001) with an R² of .39. This means that the more often a person engages in constructive

communication, the less likely it is that the sample will experience emotional distress. Constructive communication refers to active listening to each other, shares feelings, and works together to resolve conflicts which contribute to low level of emotional distress within marital relationship.

Table 3

Linear Regression Analysis to Emotional Distress from Self-Demand/ Partner Withdraw Communication Pattern (N=226)

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>Model Emotional Distress</i>
Constant	9.88	
Self-demand/partner withdraw	1.35	
<i>R</i> ²		.78
<i>F</i>		777.45***

Note. B = Coefficient of Regression, CI = Confidence interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit ****p* < .001

Table 3 shows linear regression among self-demand/ partner withdraw communication pattern and emotional distress. The result indicated that self-demand/ partner withdraw communication pattern positively predict emotional distress among married individuals (F=777.45, B= 1.35, P<.001) with an R² of .78. In a self-demand/partner withdraw communication pattern, emotional

distress can arise due to a lack of effective communication and understanding. When one partner tends to make demands on themselves, possibly setting high standards or expectations, and the other withdraws, it creates a dynamic where one may feel overwhelmed, while the other feels the need to distance themselves. Self-demand/partner withdraw tendency frequently results in a

breakdown in communication, which can lead to emotional separation, feelings of inadequacy, and dissatisfaction. Self-demanding partners may feel

more stressed and anxious, and withdrawing partners may feel under pressure or misinterpreted.

Table 4

Linear Regression Analysis to Predict Emotional Distress from Partner Demand/ self- Withdraw Communication Pattern (N=226)

Variables	<i>B</i>	Model Emotional distress
Constant	8.13	
Partner demand/ self-withdraw	1.45	
R ²		.76
F		718.79***

Note. B = Coefficient of Regression, CI = Confidence interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit ****p* < .001

Table 4 shows linear regression among partner demand/ self-withdraw communication pattern and emotional distress. The result indicated that partner demand/ self-withdraw communication pattern

withdrawal/partner-demand entails recognizing symptoms of stress, miscommunication, or unmet requirements. Demanding communication may suggest a need for reassurance or connection, while

positively predict emotional distress among married individuals (F=718.79, B= 1.45, P<.001) with an R² of .76. Predicting emotional distress based on communication patterns in a self-

withdrawal may indicate a wish for separation. When these patterns collide or people believe their needs are not being addressed on a regular basis, emotional distress may result.

Table 5

Linear Regression Analysis to predict Emotional Distress from Relationship Dissatisfaction among Married Individuals (N=226)

Variable	<i>B</i>	Model Emotional distress
Constant	43.20	
Relationship dissatisfaction	1.43	
R ²		.74
F		725.27***

Note. B = Coefficient of Regression, CI = Confidence interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit ****p* < .001

Table 5 shows linear regression among relationship dissatisfaction and emotional distress. The result indicated that relationship dissatisfaction positively predict emotional

distress among married individuals (F=725.27, B= 1.43, P<.001) with an R² of .74. When individuals are dissatisfied in their marriages, it can lead to feelings of loneliness, sadness, and frustration.

This dissatisfaction may stem from various sources such as communication issues, unmet needs, or differing expectations which leads to emotional distress.

Discussion

The current study evaluated married people's emotional discomfort, communication styles, and relationship unhappiness. Data collection was done on 226 married individuals that was living in Islamabad through purposive sampling technique. Informed consent was taken from the sample. Analyses of data provided imperative results.

The 1st hypothesis of the present study indicated that constructive communication pattern negatively predict emotional distress among married individuals was supported by the results of regression analysis (table 2). A negative coefficient suggests that as the independent variable (constructive communication) increases, the dependent variable (emotional distress) tends to decrease. Effective communication is crucial for any marriage to succeed and survive a lifetime, as well as to lessen couples' mental pain, according to the research. (Paixão et al., 2018). In a married relationship, effective communication fosters closeness and improves understanding (Nyarks & Hope, 2019). Happy married couples are more adept at managing difficult emotions than unhappy married couples, and research indicates that happy communication has a unique predictive value for the success of the marriage (Markman et al., 2010).

The 2nd hypothesis of the present study was that self-demand/ partner withdraw communication pattern is a predictor of emotional distress among married individuals was supported by the results revealed by linear regression analysis table i.e. table 3. When it comes to communication, married people with one emotionally distressed spouse tend to be less optimistic, more pessimistic, and unpleasant than couples without such a partner (Gabriel et al., 2010). A particularly powerful predictor of emotional distress in married people has been found to be self-demand/partner withdrawal (Byrne et al., 2004; Du Rocher et al., 2004). According to several studies (Benazon & Coyne, 2000; Gabriel et al.,

2010; Jackman et al., 2006; Uebelacker et al., 2003), depressive symptoms are specifically linked to more negative and fewer positive communication behaviors. Heene et al. (2007) found that higher levels of the partner demand/self-withdrawal (PD/SW) and self-demand/partner withdraw (SD/PW) patterns were associated with a diagnosis of depression in both male and female patients.

Table 4 of linear regression analysis shows that Partner demand/ self-withdraw communication pattern predict emotional distress among married individuals (hypothesis 3). Empirical studies show that couples with a depressed spouse display more partner demand, self-withdrawal, and mutually helpful communication deficits compared to couples without depression (Byrne et al., 2004). The frequency with which both partners engage in demand and withdrawal behaviors as well as avoidance and offensive conflict resolution techniques is also typically associated with higher degrees of depressive symptoms (Byrne et al., 2004; Papp et al., 2009, 2010). One communication style that is regularly observed in married persons who are experiencing marital discontent and emotional discomfort is a partner demand/self-withdraw pattern (Baucom et al., 2015).

The 4th hypothesis, Relationship dissatisfaction is a predictor of emotional distress among married individuals was also supported by the results revealed by table 5 i.e. linear regression analysis. There is strong evidence that decreased relationship satisfaction in married couples and non-marital couples is strongly correlated with a partner's or spouse's depressive symptoms (Heene et al., 2005; Kouros & Cummings, 2011; Whisman et al., 2004). According to several studies, marital discontent is a predictor of upcoming depressive symptoms (Beach & O'Leary, 1993). Previous research has also discovered that emotional suffering and relationship dissatisfaction are associated, with one influence being the married person's gender. Research shows that wives have higher levels of emotional pain when it comes to relationship dissatisfaction compared to husbands (Almeida & Kessler, 1998)

The current study has some limitations and suggestions. First limitation was that the sample of the study was married individuals and future researches may consider married couples. The data was collected from Islamabad only and future researches may study these variables from different cities of Pakistan. The population which was included in the study were not clinical and future researches may consider clinical population to study these variables. The sample size was small to generalize the results. Therefore, future researches may increase sample size to generalize the findings of the current study. The final sample consisted of 226 married individuals i.e. Only 78 females, compared to 148 males, so the groups are not equal which may affect the analysis. Future researches may take equal group of male and female

The present study has number of implications that can be applied on married individuals who are emotionally distressed and are also dissatisfied with their marriages. According to the results of the study, high levels of marital satisfaction are significantly related to positive communication patterns which shows the importance of positive communication patterns i.e. constructive communication pattern, spending time together, talking and supporting one another. Married people frequently steer unhealthy communication habits because they find it difficult to have healthy communication, especially when talking about critical concerns. Married persons perceive their participation in joint activities and time spent together as an investment made by one partner in the marriage. This investment is perceived as a type of confirmation that leads to better levels of marital pleasure.

Research on communication pattern relationship dissatisfaction and emotional distress in Pakistan can provide valuable insights into cultural nuances, helping to tailor interventions and support systems. Understanding these dynamics can contribute to improving relationship satisfaction, mental health awareness, and fostering healthier communication patterns within the specific cultural context of Pakistan. Additionally, research findings may inform mental health policies and interventions, promoting overall well-being in the country.

Conclusion

In summary, the research presents compelling evidence about the importance of communication styles, emotional distress, and dissatisfied partnerships among married individuals. Based on the study's findings, emotional distress in marriages is highly predicted negatively by constructive communication patterns but positively by relationship dissatisfaction, partner-demand/self-withdraw and self-demand/partner withdraw communication patterns. The bulk of marital problems are caused by the husband and wife's inadequate communication methods, as the study's findings reveal. Due to this, both parties go through emotional turmoil and eventually lose interest in their relationship. It is necessary for two people to comprehend one another. Matrimony, which brings about immense happiness, requires that partners read each other's body language and vocal cues.

Declaration

Conflict of interests. The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interests.

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Ethical approval and consent to participate. Ethical protocols were strictly adhered while execution of this study and evaluation of ethical protocol was conducted by an institutional review committee. Consent form was thoroughly evaluated by research supervisor and data collection proceeded only for those participants who were willing to participate.

Availability of data and materials: Data that serves to support study findings is available with corresponding author and can be made available on request.

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