

Effect of Marital Status on Positive Psychological Functioning of Young Adults

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The present paper aimed to investigate the effects of relationship status on positive psychological functioning among adults with different marital statuses. The sample comprised of N = 246 Pakistanis, 95 males and 151 females, with their age ranging from 20 – 30 years ($M=21.17$, $SD=3.10$). The objectives of the current study were achieved through demographic information form and Positive Psychological Functioning Scales (PPF), which were administered to participants through online channels. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference among different relationship status on positive psychological functioning. The findings of the study showed that different relationship statuses do not have a significant effect on positive psychological functioning, which do not support the current hypothesis, due to the presence of factors such as Pakistan being a collectivistic culture has already a strong social support system existing prior to marriages, also the sample consisted of educated individuals, an uneven sample in terms of gender, also the critical aspect of religion. Factors such as these played a key role in influencing the participants' positive psychological functioning. The results have important implications for further researches as it opens up the notion that positive psychological functioning in collectivistic cultures may operate according to different principles as compared to individualistic cultures especially where religion is of fundamental importance in the community.

Keyword. Positive psychological functioning, relationship status, Pakistan, collectivistic culture, religion

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Throughout history, philosophers considered happiness to be the highest good and ultimate motivation for human action. Yet for decades psychologists largely ignored positive subjective well-being, although human unhappiness was explored in depth. Well-being in the wide sense is considered to be the multicomponent construct of cultural, social, psychological, physical, economical, and spiritual factors (Tvorogova & Kuleshova, 2017). Psychological well-being is defined *asa system of personal traits which is evolved during person's life and manifests in profound feeling of the life importance in general as an instrument for achieving inner socially oriented purposes and is the condition for realization of capabilities and potentials* (Voronina, 2002, p. 5).

Knowledge of psychological well-being lags behind knowledge of psychological dysfunction. The imbalance is evident in magnitude of research studies of psychological problems being more in number than the literature on positive psychological functioning. A person is viewed mentally sound if he or she does not suffer from anxiety, depression, or other forms of psychological symptomatology. Despite the tendency for researchers to view positive and negative subjective experiences as polar ends of a continuum, evidence suggests that these domains are largely independent and may be evaluated separately (Huta & Hawley, 2008; Kern, Waters, Adler & White, 2015; Watson, 2000).

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Positive psychological functioning can be defined as a high frequency of positive subjective experiences, such as being challenged, experiencing autonomy, feeling good, and exercising human strengths such as courage, wisdom, and a sense of humor (Seligman, 2002).

Positive psychological functioning encompasses multiple indicators of psychological well-being and can be characterized as the positive feelings and cognitions of individuals who evaluate their lives favorably and function effectively. Two main constructs of positive psychological functioning are:

Eudaimonic. It is defined as fulfilling one's potential and identifying meaningful life pursuits (Waterman, 2007). Eudaimonia occurs when people's life activities are most congruent or meshing with deeply held values and are holistically or fully engaged. According to this construct, those under such circumstances would feel intensely alive and authentic, existing as who they really are.

Hedonism. It is defined in relation to the pursuit of pleasure and happiness (Waterman, 2007). Hedonism well-being consists of subjective happiness and concerns the experience of pleasure versus displeasure broadly construed to include all judgments about the good/bad elements of life. Happiness is thus not reducible to physical hedonism, for it can be derived from attainment of goals or valued outcomes in varied realms (Diener, Oishi, Schimmack & Suh, 1998).

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Ryff (1989) is one of the pioneers who has worked on psychological well-being. She stated that one of the dimensions of positive psychological functioning is having positive relations with others. She indicated that warm and trusting interpersonal relationships are important for psychological well-being and are also a sign of maturity. People capable of self-actualization show empathy and have strong feelings of affection toward others, and they're able to give more love and have deep friendships. (Adsera, 2018)

Marriage is a legal category that may or may not reflect underlying social attachments (Weitzman, 1981). Theoretically marital status is relevant to well-being because it indicates attachment to a significant other (Ross, Mirowsky, & Goldstein, 1990). Marital status may reflect an outdated set of categories. When asked whether they are married, widowed, separated, or never married, more and more people find none of these categories accurately describe their situation (Bumpass, Sweet, & Cherlin, 1991).

There are various views as to why an individual would chose to be in a relationship than staying single. One view states that healthy individuals are more likely to be in and stay in a relationship (Wood, Goesling, & Avellar, 2007). There are also social benefits which include increase in social support resulting in an increase in serotonin levels thus elevating mood and engaging in healthy behaviors (Stimpson & Lackan, 2007). Economic

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benefits of marriage include shared responsibilities, living expenses and even spouse insurance (Bernstein, Brett, Bush & Cohen, 2008).

Andrews and Withey (2012) conducted a study which shows that individuals who live in families were more satisfied and positive psychological function and make life more meaningful. Individual with relationship would appear more mentally healthy, and physically healthy. Another study found that positive relationship has positive effect on psychological functioning for psychological wellbeing environment mastery, purpose in life and self acceptance. Analysis revealed that individual who were in any positive relationship response significantly higher scores in positive psychological functioning than those who were single (Ryff, 1989). When studying the relation between marriage and well-being among different cultures, it was found that the association is very similar across the world. Satisfaction, in those individuals who are married over cohabitation, was greater in collectivistic nations than individualistic nations (Diener, Oishi, Schimmack & Suh, 1998).

Dush & Amato (2005) conducted a study which illustrated that relationship status was associated with an individual's subjective well-being. After a longitudinal analysis, they suggested that moving into a committed relationship resulted in improvements in an individual's well-being.

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Scott et al. (2010) found that the relationship between marital status and life satisfaction is much stronger for men than for women. The strength of the relationship between marital status and mental health is relatively comparable form men and women, although it is worth noting that married males appear to be in slightly better mental health than married females.

In the light of past literature, Verbakel (2012) conducted a study to examine the relationship between subjective well-being and partnership status. The results confirmed that married individuals have the highest level of well-being, followed by (in order) cohabiting, dating, single, and finally widowed and divorced individuals. A study was conducted to see relationship between marital status and happiness that use data from 17 national surveys, result of the study shows that marriage influence an individual's wellbeing and contentment by two prevailing ways: one is endorsement of economic satisfaction and other is improvement of healthiness(Stack, 1998).In another study, Hagerty et. Al, (1996) reported that sense of belongingness not only influences an individual's health but also impact their social and psychological functioning.

Social causation theory states that marriage itself increases happiness by providing emotional and financial support. This will preserve or increase well-being, in turn, increasing positive psychological functioning (Mastekaasa, 1994). Financial support in marriage can provide economic protection or a "safety net".

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Persons who share a household generally can gain from economies of scale (Joung et al., 1997; Rogers, 1995). Physical health in marriage also may affect well-being. The underlying relevant mechanisms include increasing the likelihood of early detection of symptoms, encouraging medical treatment, discouraging risky behaviors such as smoking and drinking, helping with recovery process and encouraging a spouse to follow a healthy diet. (Rogers, 1995; Ross, Mirowsky & Goldstein, 1990; Umberson, 1992). Lastly, married persons are more likely than others to report a higher degree of emotional support. Married couples are higher in their degree of mutual support than other couples (Joung et al., 1997; Stroube & Stroube, 1987). This indicates that through marriage people get and give emotional support, take care of their partner's health and contribute to household income which affects people's positive psychology functioning.

This research would attempt to fill the gap in literature as marital status along with positive psychological functioning has been studied less together prior to this study. Moreover, the literature reviews highlight studies largely conducted in individualistic cultures as well as cultures where Pakistan's major religion, Islam isn't widely practiced, which could reveal new avenues regarding factors influencing positive psychological functioning, as Islam has a different overview for marital roles and responsibilities, hence this study will provide new information regarding indigenous culture.

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Thus, the main objective of this study is to investigate the effect of relationship status on positive psychological functioning. The following hypothesis was formulated that “*There would be significant differences in the positive psychological; functioning of individuals with different marital statuses.*”

Method

Research Design

This is a Quantitative Comparative Research Design. In which positive psychological functioning was compared across different marital statuses.

Sample

The participants of the current study includes young adults ($N=246$) , comprising of ($n=95$) males and ($n=151$) females with different marital statuses. It was done by using convenience sampling technique. The age range of participants was between 20 to 30 years old. The sample was taken from Karachi, Pakistan.

Table 1

Table of Participants' Demographics (N = 246).

Characteristics M(SD)	f %
Age 21.17 (3.10)	

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No. of Children	
0.73(0.90)	
Years of Marriage	
02.80(1.67)	
Gender	
Male	95(38.6)
Female	151(61.4)
Relationship Status	
Committed	46(18.7)
Divorced	06(2.4)
Just Nikkah	09(3.7)
Married	65(26.4)
Single	120(48.8)
Occupation	
Students	0(0)
Professional	20 (8.1)
Full time Professional Part time Student	79 (32.1)
Full time Students Part time Professional	19(7.7)

The above-mentioned table provides the details of the participants regarding their demographic variables.

Instruments

Following measures were used in the current study.

Informed Consent. Informed consent was used to take the permission from participants, informing them briefly about the research, all their personal information would remain confidential with no deception involved and that they can leave the research at any time.

Demographic Form. Demographic form was constructed to gather information about the participants. It included name, gender, qualification, occupation and relationship status i.e single (who is not involved in any romantic relationship), committed (who is involved in dating based romantic relationship), just *nikkah*

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(who is officially married but do not reside with the partner), married (who is officially married and resides with the partner), widowed (who was in an official romantic relationship but the partner has died), divorced (who was in an official romantic relationship but the partner has officially left him or her). If they were married on in relationship ever than further questions were asked like how many years have been passed after divorce or death of spouse, duration of relationship, number of children if married, top 3 expectations from partner, how much they feel their expectations have been fulfilled from partner.

Positive Psychological Functioning Scale. The Positive Psychological Functioning scale (PPF) is a newly developed measure in Spain. It consists of 11 psychological resources: Autonomy, Resilience, Self-esteem, Purpose in life, Enjoyment, Optimism, Curiosity, Creativity, Humor, Environmental mastery and vitality. All of them are grouped into a second order factor called Positive Psychological Functioning. This measure has adequate validity and reliability. In addition, the confirmatory factor analysis showed a good level of adjustment. The PPF contains 33 items covering all the aspects mentioned above. Respondent answer on a 5-point Likert scale corresponding to various levels of agreement (i.e. Completely disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Completely agree). The overall scores of positive psychological functioning are divided into 3 ranges. Low (33-77),

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Moderate (78-121) and High (122-165; Merino, Privado, & Gracia, 2015).

Procedure

For the conduction of the survey research, permission was taken from the Institute of Professional Psychology, Bahria University Karachi Campus to conduct this study and also by acquiring permission via email correspondence from the author of the scale to use their tool in the survey research. The data was collected online. 'Google Forms' was used to post the questionnaire along with the consent form. The participants were contacted through posting the survey link online on different groups and social websites and before filling the questionnaire they were assured confidentiality and anonymity of their information.

After the completion of data collection process, forms that contained incomplete data were excluded and the rest of the collected data was entered in the statistical tool that is SPSS, then tabulated and analyzed to reveal the relationship between the positive psychological functioning and relationship status

Results

The scores on the sub scales of positive psychological functioning were compared for each relationship status using ANOVA for which the results are as follows.

Table 2

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Mean and standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of study variable.

Table 3

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) For Positive Psychological Functioning Sub Scales

		Committed (n=46)		Divorced (n=6)		Nikkah (n=9)		Married (n=65)		Single (n=120)		F	P
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Scale	No. of Items	M	SD	Range		Sk	K						
				Potential	Actual								
Autonomy	3	11.43	1.96	3-15	4-15	-	0.24						
Resilience	3	12.15	1.95	3-15	5-15	-	0.43						
Self-esteem	3	11.05	2.23	3-15	4-15	-	0.31						
Purpose in life	3	11.80	1.97	3-15	6-15	-	-						
Enjoyment	3	11.38	1.85	3-15	5-15	-	0.62						
Optimism	3	11.44	1.88	3-15	4-15	-	.636						
Curiosity	3	11.66	1.80	3-15	6-15	-	-						
Humor	3	12.00	2.00	3-15	5-15	-	0.46						
Environmental Mastery	3	10.05	1.79	3-15	4-15	-	0.00						
Vitality	3	10.95	2.10	3-15	4-15	-	0.33						
PPF	33	113.98	13.07	33-165	66-146	-	0.75						

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PPF	114.2	13.2	112.6	12.2	120.1	8.68	112.7	12.6	114.1	13.5	0.6	0.62
Autonomy	11.43	1.88	11.33	2.73	10.77	1.98	11.32	2.00	11.55	1.95	0.4	0.80
Resilience	12.30	1.95	12.50	2.34	12.44	2.12	12.09	2.14	12.10	1.83	0.2	0.93
Self-esteem	11.00	2.52	10.83	2.13	11.00	1.50	10.98	2.08	11.13	2.27	0.07	0.99
PL	12.06	2.08	13.16	1.60	12.33	1.58	11.30	1.90	11.87	1.97	2.18	0.07
Enjoyment	11.39	1.83	10.66	2.65	12.88	1.05	11.35	1.81	11.32	1.86	1.75	0.13
Optimism	11.21	1.96	10.33	1.21	12.00	1.87	11.35	1.76	11.60	1.93	1.13	0.34
Curiosity	11.65	1.91	11.16	2.48	12.66	1.32	11.30	1.73	11.81	1.76	1.68	0.15
Humor	12.10	1.72	12.33	2.16	13.22	0.97	11.72	2.05	12.01	2.11	1.22	0.30
EM	10.08	1.89	9.83	1.47	10.22	1.71	10.36	1.61	9.87	1.87	0.83	0.50
Vitality	11.02	1.91	10.50	3.01	12.55	0.88	10.93	1.97	10.85	2.23	1.46	0.21

Note. PPF=Positive Psychological Functioning, PL=Purpose in Life, EM= Environmental Matery

The results show that for positive psychological functioning and its each sub scale, differing relationship status has no significant effect as $F > 0.05$ for each subscale in each relationship status.

Table 4

Frequency and Percentage of relationship status against ranges of positive psychological functioning

Low		Moderate		High	
Frequen cy	Percent age	Frequen cy	Percent age	Frequen cy	Percent age

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Committed	1	2.2%	31	67.4%	14	30.4%
Married	0	0	50	76.9%	15	23.1
Single	3	2.5%	80	66.7%	37	30.8%

Table 4 shows that distribution of relationship status; Committed, married and single against ranges of positive psychological functioning. The scores indicate that majority of the participants regardless of their relationship status predominantly have moderate levels of positive psychological functioning.

Table 5

Mean, standard deviation and t-value for male and female's positive psychological functioning

Variables	Males (n=95)		Females (n=151)		t (df)	P	95% CL	
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL
Positive Psychological Functioning	113.07	14.14	114.57	12.38	- 0.85(180.21)	0.29	- 4.99	1.99

Table 5 shows the Mean, standard deviation and t-value of positive psychological functioning of males and females.

Discussion

The present study was conducted to assess the effects of relationship status on positive psychological functioning in Pakistani population as there has been no literature highlight this

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particular area of research. The results of this current study do not support the hypothesis of the study which allows us to conclude that Pakistan, especially Karachi where the population was sampled from is a multi-cultural city where many elements might be simultaneously at work. The hypothesis is that *there will be a significant difference among different relationship status on positive psychological functioning* was not accepted due to many factors which can be cultural, religious, spiritual or psychological.

One of the prime reasons for obtaining this result could be explained as majority of the participants did in fact had their expectations met from their partner which could explain heightened responses in terms of Positive Psychological Functioning. A research by Johnson (2015), concluded that fulfillment of expectations for married individuals are positively correlated to marital satisfaction.

Another findings of the study include no significant difference in terms of different age ranges in terms of positive psychological wellbeing could suggest that this construct is not impacted by age. A study conducted by Al- Attiyah and Nasser (2016) found no gender differences in terms of positive psychological wellbeing, a construct similar to the one addressed in the study. Furthermore, no gender differences were also found in positive psychological functioning which also validates the construct to be gender neutral as well. A study by Perez (2012) investigated gender difference on dimensions that included positive affect, negative affect, environmental mastery, personal growth, and self-acceptance and found no significant difference thus further validating that the phenomenon being investigated in the study may not be influenced by gender itself and thus independent of it.

Further explanation of the results could be due to the fact that the data was collected through online survey platforms.

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Internet access is largely if not all, is used by individuals who are educated enough to operate a computer, access the internet and have basic reading skills to identify and answer the questions. A study that of Veenhoven and Bakker (1975), concluded that the effect of happiness on education is significant in developing countries, Happiness has strong correlations with Self-Acceptance and Environmental Mastery (Ryff & Keyes, 1975) both of which are the part of the theoretical constructs of the scale used. The population targeted hence may have, due to their education status, already possessed moderate levels of positive psychological functioning, thus making relationship status redundant as a single major contributor of positive psychological functioning.

Moreover, the discrepancy from the hypothesis could also be accounted for the fact that only 95 males responded compared to 151 females. Both males and females reacted oppositely to the study. As females are more likely to discuss their feelings to their friends than males as mentioned in a study conducted by Walker (1994). That can be the reason that might be most of the males did not respond to the questionnaire. This could be explained by findings of a study conducted by Mcnelles & Connolly (2010) in which they concluded that females were likely to establish intimacy through usage of self-disclosure as compared to males

On top of that, as Pakistan is an Islamic country, a research conducted by Raza, Rasheed & Yousaf (2016) on a Pakistani population found religiosity to be a significant positive predictor of mental wellbeing within both males and females which could explain for their attained level of positive psychological functioning independent of their marital status. Further supporting literature concludes to states that spiritual and religious based practices tend to play an integral role in psychological functioning of adults (Hathaway et al., 2004).

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Regarding the cultural variables, Pakistan in terms of individualism, obtains a low score of 14/100 on one of six cultural dimensions established by Hostede. This leads to conclude that the Pakistani culture is collectivist in nature. In collectivist culture, social supports systems are vital and the results of the present study could be explained by a pre-existing social support system that enhances positive psychological wellbeing regardless of the relationship status. A study supporting this claim found that sense of belonging to be significant indicator of psychological wellbeing. Hagerty, Williams, Coyne & Early (1996). Further literature findings state social support to be a buffer for individuals facing stressful situations. (Dahlem, Zimet & Walker, 1991)

To state that a combination of the factors stated above could also together influence positive psychological functioning would be fair. A study by Husain, et al. (2014) concluded in its findings that low socio-economic status as well as lack of social support were strongly associated with psychological distress, which is the theoretical opposite of the construct included in the present study which also strengthens the argument that the participants' education which is a determinant of socio-economic status (Winkleby, Jatulis, Frank, & Fortmann, 1992) as well as their support system may well account for the measured levels of positive psychological functioning.

Limitations and Suggestions

The limitations of the study would be the unequal representation of participants in terms of gender. Moreover, the study at present did measure a component of relationship satisfaction by asking the participants regarding their expectations being met through their partner, which could be a vital component in predicting and possibly influencing positive psychological functioning.

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Furthermore, as the participants were reached out through online surveys, the population who do not have access to internet are left out, it would be recommended to include them in the study in the future.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the effects of differing relationship status on positive psychological functioning. The data was collected from 246 participants, 95 males and 151 females. The findings of the study show that in Pakistani culture specifically, relationship status does not play a significant role in determining positive psychological functioning as there are other indicators that are simultaneously at work in terms of religion, social support systems, preferred or perceived gender differences in intimacy, education level and the socio-economic status. Further researches in which demographic variables are studied in isolation along with positive psychological functioning may shed more light. Moreover, the study also takes note that Pakistani culture is a complex cultural phenomenon where multiple agents seem to play their role possible in the presence of each other.

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