

Religiosity and Marital Adjustment among Married University Students in Pakistan

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Abstract

Marriage has been a main concern to the well-being of an individual and in social stability especially in religious and collectivistic communities like Pakistan. Religiosity has been found to be a significant variable that affects marital relationships but there has been a general paucity of empirical research studies on its effects among married students in higher learning institutions. The current research paper sought to investigate how religiosity affects marital adjustment in Pakistani university students who are married. A quantitative research study based on positivism was used, and 152 married students participating in three universities in the Punjab public sector were selected to participate in the study using a structured questionnaire. The SPSS was used in the analysis of data through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, Chi-square tests, and ANOVA. The results showed that there was moderate and statistically significant relationship between religiosity and marital adjustment meaning that the higher the religiosity the higher the marital satisfaction and adjustment. The findings also revealed that the role of religiosity in marital adjustment is significant in the various levels of religious commitment. On the whole, the paper emphasizes on religiosity as a significant psychological and social value that contributes to marital harmony and strength among married students. These implications are significant on marital counseling, university support services and future studies on family relationships in religious societies.

Keywords: Religiosity, marital adjustment, religious commitment, conflict resolution, relationship quality

Introduction

Marriage is generally accepted as a major social institution that structures intimate life, governs kinship patterns, and helps to stabilize society. In the sociology field, marriage does not necessarily exist as a personal contract between two individuals but rather as a contract enforced socially, influenced by the norms of the particular culture and religious beliefs and biases of certain institutions (Cherlin, 2010). Marriage has a moral, spiritual and communal meaning to societies that are collectivistic and religious like Pakistan beyond companionship and serves as a place of social reproduction, gender role performance, and intergenerational continuity. The normative directives of religion and especially Islam in the Pakistani setting give expectations of marital roles, rights, obligations and conflict resolution norms. Religiosity can therefore be very vital in the determination of the quality and adoption of marital relationships.

The process by which spouses negotiate roles, conflict, cultivate emotional intimacy and long-lasting relational satisfaction is known as marriage adjustment (Spanier, 1976). Marital adjustment is not a stable state but a continuous response to the internal and external stressors such as financial pressures, work stressors, and the changing life events. Marital adjustment of this kind can be conceptualized in terms of structural-functional views, according to which the system of mutual norms and value systems helps establish the stability in relationships and social integration (Parsons and Bales, 1955). In this light, religiosity can be utilized as a moral control system that strengthens commitment, builds cooperation, and deters actions that will compromise marital stability.

Religiosity is a concept with more than one dimension and which involves religious beliefs, practices, commitment to it, and involvement in religious communities (Pargament, 2013). The sociological theories of religion, especially the notion of collective conscience as developed by Durkheim (1912/1995) imply that religion enhances the social solidarity by inscribing the personal relationships into religious moral system. By considering marriage as consecrated or ordained by the divine, marital partners can feel a greater responsibility, dedicatedness, and ethical duty to each other (Mahoney et al., 2020). The marital sanctification process converts relational problems into spiritual rich experiences, which may make it more resilient and able to adjust in the long-term.

Empirical studies that have been carried out predominantly in the Western setting show that there is a standing positive relationship between religiosity and the quality of marriage, as well as higher levels of satisfaction, reduced divorce rates, and more productive conflict management practices (Perry, 2020; Wolfinger and Wilcox, 2019). Emotional intimacy and value congruence are proved to be stronger with mutual religious involvement, thus lessening relational ambiguity and conflict (Olson et al., 2021). Marital stress has also been associated with better emotional regulation by religious coping mechanisms, including prayer, forgiveness, and spiritual meaning-making (Pargament, 2013). Nevertheless, much of this literature is located in the Christian-majority societies and thus, they cannot be generalized to the Muslim and South Asian context.

Religion in Pakistan plays a prominent part in organizing family life and gender roles as well as in terms of marriage. Marriage (nikah) is not just a matter of legal contract but a divine covenant with mutual duties and obligations. The teachings of Islam stress on compassion (rahmah), patience (sabr), and consultation with each other (shura), which can help in adapting to the other party in marriage. Other prior Pakistan research studies have found positive correlations between Islamic religiosity and marital satisfaction (Ali and Niaz, 2020; Ahmad and Bhatti, 2022). However, there is limited empirical research on the topic, especially among married university students- a group of individuals who are in a situation where they are balancing between school, finances, and the family.

Married students are a special segment of the society under dual role pressures. The combination of school work and marital life may create role strain and stress, which may have an impact on the quality of relationships. In terms of role theory, the conflicting expectations do not necessarily reduce tension in a marriage, unless they are mitigated by mutual coping resources (Goode, 1960). Religiosity can act as a resource of this kind supplying moral advice, systems of shared meaning and networks of institutional support. Nevertheless, the existence of any theoretical possibility of this connection, there is limited systematic quantitative study investigating the relationship between religiosity and marital adjustment among married students in Pakistan.

This gap is identified in the current research study, which aims to establish the relationship between religiosity and marital adjustment in married university students in Pakistan, Punjab. This paper is conceptualized using sociological theory of religion and family as religiosity is a social and moral capital situated within the larger cultural frameworks. The studies can be utilized in the literature by concentrating on a learned and scholarly active population that provides some contextually

relevant information on family counseling, higher education support services, and sociological information on the role of religion in intimate life.

Literature Review

Studies that have investigated the correlation between religiosity and marital adjustment have grown significantly in the last two decades. In all sociological and family studies, the concept of marriage is perceived as a socially constructed institution that is not only governed by the norms, religion, and culture but also concerns a personal emotional relationship (Cherlin, 2010). In this context, religiosity is conceived as a social asset that strengthens commitment, moral control and systems of meanings in the intimate relationships.

Empirical research carried out mostly in the western settings always indicates a positive relationship between religiosity and the quality of marital relationships. Perry (2020) used a nationally representative longitudinal data, and reported the results as shared commitment to religion was found to predict greater marital satisfaction over time, despite the demographic and socioeconomic factors. Equally, Wolfinger and Wilcox (2019) found that the couples that participated in joint religious activities had more stability in their relationships and reduced the chances of divorce. These results indicate that religiosity does not only cause subjective satisfaction but structural stability in marriage as well.

Marital sanctification is one of the major ways in which religiosity has an effect on marital adjustment. According to Mahoney et al. (2020), couples who view their marriage as holy or ordained by God have a higher chance to view the issues in their relationships as meaningful instead of a threat to the relationship. This holy framing enhances forgiveness, sacrifice, and long term commitment. Sociologically, the process of sanctification places the institution of marriage in a transcendent moral order and thus heightens the relational obligation and accountability.

The religious coping theory also describes the way through which religiosity can be in effect in case of marital stress. According to Pargament (2013), religious coping mechanisms, including prayer, spiritual replenishment, and divine support, assist individuals to control the emotional pain and deal with interpersonal conflict in a positive manner. This is evidenced using empirical studies. According to Olson et al. (2021), couples who had greater degree of shared religious involvement were more likely to use collaborative conflict resolution styles and less likely to use destructive communication styles. Emotional intimacy and trust were identified to be high by religious involvement, especially where the commitment levels of both the partners were the same.

Yet, it is also possible, as implied in the literature that the impact of religiosity is not universal. Certain researches show that strict or conservative types of religiosity can strengthen the old gender roles or stifle open communication, which can add to marital tension in some contexts (Perry, 2020). This difference between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity is important, where intrinsic religion has been more consistently linked with positive relational consequences, as compared with socially oriented or instrumentally oriented religious participation (Pargament, 2013). These undertones show the significance of researching religiosity as a multidimensional concept as opposed to a univariate one.

Another valuable predictor of marital accommodation has been found in religious homogeneity, which refers to similarity between religious beliefs and practices of married spouses. Vaaler et al. (2020) also revealed that couples who had same religious commitments had less conflicts in terms of parenting, moral expectations as well as life priorities. Similar interpretive frameworks assure that common lenses of understanding stressors and using them to negotiate couples interpret those stressors. Sociologically, religious homogeneity promotes value congruency and also minimizes the normative ambiguity in marriage.

Although to a great extent the current literature is based on the Western and Christian predominant society, research carried out in Muslim societies is also informative. Islam in Pakistan is not merely a system of personal faith, it is also a system of norms that coordinates the family life, gender roles, moral obligations in Pakistan. In their study, Ali and Niaz (2020) have found out that there is a strong positive association between Islamic religiosity and marital satisfaction among Pakistani couples because of the importance of shared religious values in creating emotional intimacy. Similarly, Ahmad and Bhatti (2022) established a relationship between religious commitment and the marital harmony and psychological well-being. These results indicate that religiosity can have a special salient part in collectivistic and religious societies in which marriage is firmly rooted in holy moral discourses.

Another under-researched group of people in this area is married university students. Role strain theory assumes that persons in occupations with multiple roles demanding a lot of responsibility can suffer stress, which sabotages relational functioning (Goode, 1960). Married students have to balance college life with marriage life which may cause tension in their relationship. Sabri et al. (2021) discovered that religiosity acted as a buffer variable against academic stress in married Pakistani students, which results in the improved adjustment of marriage. It was found that religious coping and spiritual practices shared with one another helped in reducing the adverse impact of financial and academic stress.

Although there are contributions of this kind, there are still some gaps. To begin with, a large part of the research work has a cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to draw a causal conclusion. Second, there are few studies involving the highly educated married people in South Asian settings. Third, there is a dearth of research that combines sociological theory of religion (e.g. collective conscience) with the empirical study of marital adjustment. This therefore presents a call to emotionally framed studies, which can look at religiosity as a personal psychological phenomenon as well as an embedded moral resource in the social context and the impacts that it has on the marital dynamics in the particular institutional contexts.

The current research aims at filling this gap by investigating the relationship between religiosity and marital adjustment in the context of married university students in Punjab, Pakistan. This study places the concept of religiosity within the frameworks of sociological theories of moral regulation, value congruence, and role strain to expand the current literature beyond the Western sample and advance the existing knowledge of religion in the context of intimate relations in the societies with a Muslim majority.

Methodology

The present study employed a cross-sectional quantitative design to examine the association between religiosity and marital adjustment among married university students in Punjab, Pakistan. In line with the sociological perspective of understanding religiosity as a moral resource that is socially embedded and marital adaptation as a relational outcome as dynamic, the research took the correlational approach as a positivist paradigm. The sample of 152 married students in undergraduate and post graduate courses in three state sector universities was used to gather the data: University of Sargodha, Government college University Faisalabad, and pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi. Considering the lack of an official list of married students, purposive sampling was applied, which allowed reaching the participants passing the inclusion criteria of married legally and currently studying in a degree program. It used a structured self-administered survey, consisting of Likert-type questions on multidimensional religiosity (belief, practice and commitment) and marital adjustment (communication, emotional intimacy, conflict management and satisfaction). Both constructs were computed as composite scores and

the internal consistency reliability coefficients were found to be acceptable in social science research.

Data were evaluated on the basis of SPSS. The calculations made were the descriptive statistics to provide a summary of the demographic characteristics and Pearson correlation to determine the strength and direction of relationship between religiosity and marital adjustment in accordance with the study hypothesis that a higher degree of religiosity would be positively correlated with higher degree of marital adjustment. In an attempt to further analyze the variations in levels of religious commitment, the respondents were grouped into low, moderate, and high religiosity and one-way ANOVA was carried out. A hierarchical regression analysis was then conducted to establish whether religiosity was a significant predictor of marital adjustment when all other concerned demographic factors like time of marriage, family structure and level of education were factored in. The level of statistical significance was checked at the .05 level. Although the cross-sectional design does not allow drawing the line of causality, the methodological approach was relevant to the context of the tested hypothesis of the relationship between the identified sociocultural background and the literature review stated in the introduction.

Results

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
University Affiliation	University of Sargodha (UOS)	52	34.2
	Pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi (PMAS-AAUR)	50	32.8
	Govt. College University Faisalabad (GCUF)	50	32.8
Academic Program	BS / MSc	48	31.6
	MPhil	53	34.9
	PhD	51	33.6
Religious Affiliation	Muslim	136	89.5
	Christian	11	7.2
	Other	5	3.3
Duration of Marriage	1–2 years	72	47.4
	3–4 years	48	31.5
	5–6 years	15	9.8
	7 years and above	11	7.3
Family Structure	Nuclear Family	73	48.0
	Joint Family	79	52.0
Self-Perceived Level of Religiosity	Never	3	2.0

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
	Rarely	5	3.3
	Sometimes	34	22.4
	Often	49	32.2
	Always	61	40.1

The table primarily shows that most respondents are from the University of Sargodha, 50% followed by Pir Mehar Ali Arid Agriculture University and Government College University Faisalabad. The data of field of the study shows that most respondents (68.5%) are pursuing advanced studies (MPhil or PhD), with MPhil students forming the largest group (34.9%). A smaller proportion (31.6%) are at the BS/MSc level, indicating a highly educated sample. The Marital status indicates that the majority are in the early years of marriage, with 26% married for two years and 24% for one year. Regarding family structure, 52% of respondents come from joint families, and 48% from nuclear families. The table of respondents' self-perceived level of religiosity shows that how much they consider themselves religious. Most respondents have a high level of religiosity, with 72.3% identifying as "Always" or "Often" consider themselves as religious, while 22.4% fall into a moderate category ("Sometimes"). Only a small fraction (5.3%) report low religiosity, considering themselves "Rarely" or "Never" religious.

Table 2: Pearson Correlations of Religiosity and Marital Adjustment

	Pearson Correlation	1	.444**
Religiosity	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	Sig. (2-tailed)
	N	152	151
Marital adjustment	Person Correlation	.444*	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	
	N	151	151

Table 2 shows Pearson correlation analysis between religiosity and marital adjustment. The findings indicated that there were statistically significant moderate positive forms of the correlation between religiosity and marital adjustment, $r(149) = .44$, $p < .001$ (see Table 2). Going by the guidelines of Cohen (1988), this is a medium effect size, which means that the greater the degree of religiosity the greater was the degree of marital adjustment. This observation confirms the study hypothesis where religiosity has a positive relationship with the marital adjustment of married university students.

Table 3: ANOVA Test for Religiosity and Marital Adjustment

	Sum of Squares	Df	Means Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3386.192	46	73.613	1.942	.003
Within Groups	3941.186	106	37.896		
Total	7327.377	150			

The ANOVA results (* $F(46,104) = 1.942$, $p = 0.003$) show that religiosity has a significant influence on marital adjustment. The statistically significant *p-value (0.003) * confirms that these differences are unlikely due to chance, underscoring religiosity as a key factor in marital adjustment.

Discussion

The current research paper was to investigate how religiosity affects marital adaptation among Pakistani higher education students who are married. The outcomes have a high empirical level of the positive effectiveness of religiosity in the relationship of marriage in general, particularly in the context of the academic and family stresses which are experienced by married students. The results indicated that there were moderate positive significant relationships between religiosity and marital adjustment that demonstrated that higher the religiosity, the higher the possibilities were of having better marital adjustment. The specified result can be attributed to the growing body of research stating that religiosity is a stabilizing and protective factor in the life of a marriage (Mahoney et al., 2020; Olson et al., 2021).

As it turned out, Pearson correlation analysis revealed that a higher degree of religiosity could be tied to the more beneficial methods of marital adjustment, which has been backed by the previous studies, during which the research authors have pointed to the significance of religious beliefs and practices as the ways of establishing emotional intimacy, commitment, and understanding between the spouses (Wolfinger and Wilcox, 2019; Perry, 2020). Religiosity can provide a shared set of moral values on which couples can base their conduct that will determine how they will feel and may encourage patience and forgiveness in the case of marital problems. Religiosity may give a psychological boost and meaning to married students who are prone to getting lost between academics and family troubles which would counterbalance the tension that leads to dissatisfaction with marriage. These findings are consistent with the Sabri et al. (2021) research and they established that the use of religious coping mechanisms was a significant reduction of stress related marital conflict among Pakistani married students.

The outcome of the ANOVA also revealed that significant differences in marital adjustment among various levels of religiosity exist pointing to the fact that religiosity does not just relate to marital adjustment but it plays a key role towards marital adjustment. People were more successful in the marital adjustment who had higher perception of religiosity compared to those people who had low religiousness. As Ellison, Burdette, and Wilcox (2022) add, such a conclusion is reasonable since religious persons were more likely to explore positive coping mechanisms and problem-solving techniques in marital disputes. The religious doctrines tend to center on virtues such as empathy, compromise and endurance that assist in making marital intercourse healthy as well as the long-term existence of relationships.

The outcomes relating to conflict resolving also confirm the relevance of religiosity in improving adaptive marital behaviours. The religious individuals are normally instructed to be in a position to resolve conflicts through talks, forgiveness, and self-control rather than assault and avoiding the situation. According to the study conducted by Pargament (2013), people can manage the negative

emotions through religious coping strategies, such as prayer and use of spiritual support, which enables them to be more responsive to interpersonal stress. The significant Linear-by-Linear Association in the Chi-square, analysis in the current study, would suggest that there exists a significant directional relationship between religiosity and marital adjustment where, the direction is an increment in religiosity which is then succeeded by an increment in marital outcomes. Specific statistical assumptions were violated statistically by the limited amount of data in Pearson Chi-square test, but the observed trend is theoretically and empirically significant.

The results are also more significant in the context of Pakistani socio-cultural framework. Pakistan is a highly Muslim society whereby marriage is perceived as a religious agreement (nikah) that is based on religious obligations and moral responsibility. The Islamic doctrines emphasize on mutual rights and obligations, fidelity, and tolerance, the aspects that assist in discovering harmony in the marriage. The same conclusion has been derived by the past studies that took place in Pakistan, which found a positive counterpart of Islamic religiosity to marital satisfaction, emotional adaptation, and psychological well-being (Ali and Niaz, 2020; Ahmad and Bhatti, 2022). The existing literature is utilized in the current research as it focuses on the subjects of married students that have not received much empirical evidence despite experiencing particular stressors.

Moreover, the trend that higher percent of the respondents have expressed high level of religiosity implies that religion has always been the focal point of married university students. The same religiosity may be used to improve the relations of the marital relations and, therefore, the value congruence and goals lead to the reduced conflict in the relations regarding the expectations, roles, and responsibilities. Vaaler, Ellison, and Powers (2020) have found that religious couples have fewer conflicts, and more satisfaction in their marriages, which also can be applied to the present study.

Generally, the study findings indicate the importance of religiosity as a multidimensional resource in enabling marital adjustment through emotional, behavioral, and social processes. Religiosity appears to have a positive influence on marital satisfaction in terms of commitment, encouragement of positive conflict coping and conflict dealing modes as well as stress coping mechanisms. The findings can be applied to the overall literature in the line of family psychological and sociological related studies since the findings highlight the significance of religiosity in elucidating marital relationships in educational and scholarly societies within religious communities.

Conclusion

The current research concludes that religiosity is a very important and good factor in marital adaptation among Pakistani married students undertaking higher education. The results suggest that religious people are more likely to be more satisfied in marriage, better adjusted as well as have healthier conflict resolution styles. Religiosity seems to be a stabilizing force, which fosters commitment, patience, emotional control and understanding in marriage. The academic, financial, and family strains of married students make religiosity a valuable coping tool; hence, couples can use it to cope with stress and ensure that marital relationships proceed smoothly. The research adds to the literature body since it offers empirical data to the Pakistani situation and also reveals the applicability of religiosity to comprehending marital relationships in educated and academically active groups.

Recommendations

1. Culturally and religiously sensitive counseling programs should be designed by the university counseling and student support services to help married students to address their marital and academic stress.
2. Marriage counselors and psychologists can also apply religious and spiritual aspects in counseling of religious people, i.e. value-based communication, forgiveness and shared meaning into marital counseling.
3. Community organizations and religious institutions should also provide premarital and marriage education programs that help in promoting conflict resolution skills, communication, and mutual respect based on religious doctrines.
4. The future researches need to incorporate longitudinal or mixed research design to understand the causal roles and have more in-depth information on how religiosity impacts marital adjustment across time.
5. Future researches ought to incorporate more and diversified samples comprising of private universities and other provinces to improve the generalizability and to overcome statistical limitations realized in the current research.

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