

---

## Marital Challenges and Marital Satisfaction across Different Stages of Marriage: A Review

---

Sehrish Wazir<sup>1\*</sup>

### Abstract

Marriage is most beautiful among all social relations. Long term marriages go through different stages as the time adds into length of marriage. Larson (2003) explained three distinct stages: i) *romantic love*, ii) *disillusionment and distraction*, and iii) *dissolution: adjustment with resignation, or adjustment with contentment*. The focus of this review article is to discuss the common challenges of marriage and factors associated with marital satisfaction across these stages. It is identified that married couples face problems related to finances, child-care, influence of family members of spouse, sexual issues and unrealistic expectations of spouse. These challenges can be dealt using intrapersonal traits such as positive communication, problem solving skills, sense of gratitude, ability to forgive, high self-esteem, and accepting the partner and interpersonal skills such as showing affection, respect, praise, doing shopping for partner, spending time together, and supporting partner in matters of life. Marital satisfaction can be enhanced by attending premarital and marital counseling.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal Skills, Marital Challenges, Marital Counseling, Marital Problems, Marital Satisfaction, Premarital Counseling, Stages of Marriage

---

<sup>1\*</sup>Lecturer, Department of Applied Psychology, Government Sadiq College Women University, Bahawalpur, Pakistan.

**\*Corresponding Author Email:**  
sehrishwazir15@gmail.com

---

### Introduction

This article provides the overview of the topic exploring key concepts and comprehensive details since the beginning of humanity, the relationship between a husband and a wife is considered most beautiful, sacred, and strong. Through marriage, one can achieve a sense of spiritual happiness and legal physical satisfaction. The reason behind choosing this approach is that it provides detailed introduction to the topic, it covers basic concepts and elaborated ideas and constructs and give a neutral perspective on the topic.

As two people are most close to each other in the bond of marriage, they face challenges as well. In the context of marital challenges and demands, it's crucial to first have a look on the different layers of marriage that unfold with the passage of

time. A marriage passes through many distinct stages when it comes to long term relation. These stages have been studied and presented differently (in terms of the number of stages, and duration and requirements of each stage) by different researchers.

The challenges that couples' face during these stages of marriage may be related to money, child rearing and inappropriate influence of the family of spouse (Miller et al., 2014). Unemployment, limited earning, financial abuse by partner, or not knowing the ways to distribute finances effectively bring clashes between spouses. The birth of a child brings with itself lot of challenges for both parents, hence becomes a source of psychological distress for the unprepared parents. It is also observed that partners sometimes give more value to the opinions of the members of their family of origin. Allowing family members to interfere in practical matters may give rise to conflicts between partners.

This review article uniquely covers the knowledge gap and allows for the detailed synthesis of the current literature. The topic

---

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial 4.0 International License (<https://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-Commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified.

© Copyright: The Author (2024)

has high societal significance as marital issues are rising so rapidly leading to unsustainable marriages furthermore it has practical applications which make this topic worthy to be discussed and reviewed.

### **Theoretical Background**

The family system theory best explains the challenges and satisfaction with in the marital relationship. The couples use a dyadic way to resolve conflicts. The transactional patterns shape their behavior and the couples tend to adjust to the demands of each other meeting their needs and solving problems (Klinnert et al., 2017).

The socio-cultural factors play a significant role in the marital challenges faced by couples. The factors include the gender roles and stereotypes, economic disparities and pressure along with the differences in values and norms of the partners and families. Educational level also plays a key role in such a dimension alongside work-life balance is another point of discord.

### **Stages of Marriage**

Larson (2003) identified three stages of long-term marriages. The first stage is named as *romantic love*. It is the period during initial months/years of marriage where partners have strong feelings of passion and liking for each other. This may be like a foggy screen where partners only find loved but unable to see the unwanted sides of each other. They are also unaware of the demands of marital stability. There are several factors associated with the romantic love stage it leads to collective self enhancement and stronger bonding secondly enhanced partner support collectively strengthens the relationship (Farooqi, 2014). The second stage is *disillusionment and distraction*: this stage may appear slowly when the other tasks are added in the relationship. During this stage, the attention of spouses is divided into raising kids, managing finances and other practical responsibilities within marriage. The couples start admitting that marriage is something that needs a lot of hard work to be intact and stable. This stage accompanies

many challenges as the persona built to have everything in to place is shattered and a new demanding and tiring phase of real world is opened to the couples. Minor problems and responsibilities becomes so tiring for the couples along with the factors like managing finances , cleaning house, demands posed by children are all factors making this stage difficult for partners (Jen, 2019). The third and final stage comprises of *dissolution: adjustment with resignation, or adjustment with contentment*. This is actually the stage of decision where partners have come across all the benefits and drawbacks related to the marriage. Now it's the time to either dissolve the marriage if partners feel themselves unable to fulfill the tiring demands of this relationship or on the other hand, they feel more committed to continue marriage because they have focused blessings and rewards associated with this effort requiring relationship. The common challenges associated with this stage are diminished intimacy, unresolved conflicts and changes in roles and responsibilities (Onu, 2024).

In the light of above stages, it is observed that stage two and three seem a source of stress for many couples as they have to come out of their comfort zone in order to save their marriage. A study included 290 adults (196 women and 94 men) from a refugee camp in Jordan. The findings found that marriage satisfaction, self-esteem, and life satisfaction differed considerably between males and females, indicating that women had lower subjective well-being. Many of the mental health symptoms in this study were more common in women than in men, including somatization, obsessive compulsive behavior, interpersonal sensitivity, sadness, anger, and psychoticism (Al-Krenawi & Bell, 2023).

### **Challenges of Marriage**

Research has confirmed that marriage brings many psychological benefits for both spouses (Bierman et al, 2006). Keeping in mind that man is a social animal; marriage is most crucial bond to connect socially with someone. In addition to social

connectedness, a stable marriage further gives opportunities of self-growth in almost every area of life. It is worth mentioning that married individuals report higher satisfaction from life as compared to unmarried (although cohabitating) individuals (Uecker, 2012). This may be the reason God has given so much importance to this beautiful bond and people belonging to any religion and culture prefer getting married.

The qualitative research model signified marriage and challenges faced in the marital relationship. After the interview with the six participants the respondents signified the problems related to family, not having children despite several years of marriage, disagreements were the major themes. The solutions presented were to solve the issues mutually, treat the spouses with mutual respect and getting advice from other people in the family (Kaya et al., 2021).

It has also been seen that marriage is typically associated with phased on disagreements and agreements. The study showed that middle class is more prone to transitions between adjustment and disagreements. The reason behind this includes the negative communication between spouses and distress thus it was concluded that figuring out the marital satisfaction by assessing a few or single domain is a complex phenomena it needs multiple factors (Karney & Bradbury, 2020).

A recent research conducted by Wazir et al. (2020), explored that Respecting each other, praising each other and shopping gifts for each other enhances the marital satisfaction of couples. Continuing with these social skills, Spending time together and doing activities together adds into marital wellbeing. (Amato, 2007).

Among all the factors that may lead to the satisfaction of marriage, the results of research conducted by Sánchez and Mota (2023) seem most valuable. In the research, personal traits such as high self-esteem, problem solving skills and caring attitude

for the partner were found as indicators of marital satisfaction. It is evident that persons with high self-esteem see problems as challenges and use their problem solving skills in tough situations. Moreover, forgiving the unfavorable acts of spouse consequently increases the marital satisfaction (Mirzadeh & Fallahchay, 2012). When discussing personal domain, a grateful attitude towards even small blessings of life is linked with improved mental wellbeing. Gratitude impacts marital satisfaction even in infertile couples. (Suminta & Ghufon, 2022).

The topic of sex cannot be overlooked when talking about marital problems or challenges. No matter at what stage the marriage is, sexual problems can become a source of stress among married individuals. These problems as highlighted by Christensen & Miller (2006), may include frequency of sex, changes in the sexual desire of spouses, quality of sex, and infidelity related to sex. Research has found that sexual incompatibility, lack of time and attention, childlessness, and failure to maintain oneself. Research has shown that males engage in illicit relationships when they are not sexually satisfied with their partner and when their partner is no longer appealing (Bibi et al., 2024).

It is a matter of great understanding that many times both partners are doing their best for the continuation of smooth marriage. As each partner has a different concept of smooth marriage, he/she may have different expectations from the spouse. These expectations may be unrealistic to some extent. If one partner's actions and behavior is not up to the expectations of the other partner, marital conflicts may arise as explored by Whisman et al. (1997).

In the domain of marital problems, it is worth mentioning that male and female mentality is different in perceiving the marital challenges. Females have been seen to report low level of marital satisfaction than males. Male perceives and deals with the marital stress well as compare to

females. Likewise, women exhibit higher levels of marital challenges than males because they tend to stabilize the relationship rationally and females involve an emotional aspect which is less stable (Storaasli and Markman, 1990).

After all the above discussion on marital challenges, a question comes to mind that what are the strategies couples employ in order to go through all these challenges successfully. The following paragraphs will discuss scientifically proven strategies to preserve the charm of marriage in the presence of hard times.

### **Marital Satisfaction**

The Socio-cultural factors play a great role in stabilizing marital relationships and bringing marital satisfaction. Family values and expectations are met the relationship is strengthened; secondly gender roles, financial management, intimate personal relationships all contribute to the satisfied marriages in cultural domain. The societal influence includes the social support and availability of resources for the sustainable marriage (Katz & Briger, (1988).

In addition to these personal traits, acceptance of partner is associated with higher marital satisfaction and it also helps in expressing affection. (İyiaydın, and Sümer, 2023). It is a traditional style that partners perceive acceptance in terms of willingness for the contract of marriage. It is rather accepting the spouse with all his/her qualities and flaws. This type of acceptance adds to the marital satisfaction. The other important area of marital satisfaction is related to sexual satisfaction for both partners. Satisfied sexual performance is linked with more satisfied marriage. (Golmakani et al., 2013). In this regard, it should also be noted that the process of habituation occurs when an individual faces similar stimuli over an extended period of time (Avery & Blackford, 2016). This pattern can occur even in social relationships and especially in sexuality. It is recommended to bring newness in sexual stimulation and response in order to maintain its attraction.

It is further discovered that adding positive communication and avoiding negative communication patterns may elevate marital satisfaction. (Lavner et al., 2016). In addition to positive communication, Spousal support in practical matters of life is a major contributor to marital satisfaction (Gallimore et al., 2006).

Premarital counseling is of great importance in relation to marital satisfaction. It is evident that individuals who receive premarital counseling show a higher level of marital satisfaction than the individuals who do not receive. (Kepler, 2015). Several premarital counseling approaches have been used over years amongst them the most preferred is Gotman method which includes building intimacy along with focusing on conflict resolution and promoting empathy (Shadish & Baldwin, 2003). A recent study discovered that premarital counselling addressed issues such as conflict resolution, communication, finances, coping with differences, future goals, parenthood, sex, and extended family relationships. Respondents believed that premarital counselling was both important and useful in coping with critical marriage concerns. (Amoah-Saah, 2023).

If counseling is not taken prior to getting married, it can be taken after getting married. The solution focused brief therapy has been particularly important for resolving challenges in marital life. It will focus on solutions that are causing conflicts and problems together with developing positive relationships (Markman et al., 2013). Marital counseling has also been linked with increased perception of marital satisfaction (Devi et al., 2021).

### **Conclusion**

Marriage is a long term journey where partners share every matter of life. Each stage brings with itself the unique characteristics and challenges. The starting seems fascinating and cloudy where partners are unable to see any negativity. For many, it is most memorable time of marriage. But when it comes to more practical side of marriage, it brings

psychological distress for few couples whereas for few, it is bliss. The article briefly highlights the challenges and satisfactions in marital life in order to make couples life hassle free. To deal with the distress created by the responsibilities of marriage, existing literature suggests partners to work on their intrapersonal skills such as self-esteem, problem solving, gratitude for blessings of life and forgiveness for partner's and accepting the partner unconditionally. The other area to work on is interpersonal skills such as respecting, expressing affection, spending time together, improving sexual skills, caring and supporting each other. It is also evident that premarital counseling and marital counseling can be helpful in achieving and enhancing marital satisfaction.

### Contribution of Author

Sehrish Wazir: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft, Writing - Reviewing & Editing

### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the author.

### Source of Funding

The author declared no source of funding.

### Data Availability Statement

The current study is a review of existing literature, hence, no datasets were used in the current study.

### References

- Al-Krenawi, A., & Bell, M. M. (2023). Gender differences in Syrian refugees in Jordan: Psychological, self-esteem, family function, marital satisfaction, and life satisfaction. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 69(3), 714-723.
- Amato, P. R. (2007). *Alone together: How marriage in America is changing*. Harvard University Press.
- Amoah-Saah, I. (2023). *Impact of Premarital Counselling on Marital Satisfaction and Adjustment among SDA Members* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Coast). <https://ir.ucc.edu.gh/xmlui>
- Avery, S. N., & Blackford, J. U. (2016). Slow to warm up: the role of habituation in social fear. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 11(11), 1832–1840. <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsw095>
- Bibi, M., Rafique, R., Nazir, A., Zahid, H., Mukhtar, S., & ul Huda, N. (2024). Perceptions of Married Adults Regarding Extramarital Affairs in Lahore, Pakistan. *Human Nature Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(2), 334-346.
- Bierman, A., Fazio, E. M., & Milkie, M. A. (2006). A Multifaceted Approach to the Mental Health Advantage of the Married: Assessing How Explanations Vary by Outcome Measure and Unmarried Group. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27, 554–582.
- Christensen, S. A., & Miller, R. B. (2006). Areas of desired change among married midlife individuals. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy*, 5(3), 35–57.
- Devi, B., Lepcha, N., & Giri, D. (2021). Effect of Marital counseling on marital satisfaction among married couples- A Mini Review. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 08(03), 2394-5125.
- Farooqi, S. R. (2014). The construct of relationship quality. *Journal of Relationships Research*, 5, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jrr.2014.2>
- Gallimore, S. A., Hughes, J. L., & Geldhauser, H. A. (2006). Marriage length, spousal support, and marital satisfaction in dual-income men and women. *Modern Psychological Studies*, 12(1), 61-

69.  
<https://scholar.utc.edu/mps/vol12/is/s1/8>
- Golmakani, N., Dormohammadi, M., & Mazloun, S. R. (2013). Survey of sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction during postpartum at primiparous women referred to health care centers of Mashhad, Iran. *The Iranian Journal of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Infertility*, 16(55), 7-13.
- İyiyaydın, A. A., & Sümer, Z. H. (2023). The mediational role of intimate partner acceptance and psychological adjustment in the relationship between intimate partner control and marital adjustment. *Current Psychology*, 42, 1598–1608. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01468-2>
- Jen. (2019). *Disillusionment in marriage*. Surprised by Marriage. <https://surprisedbymarriage.com/2017/10/14/disillusionment/>
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (2020). Research on Marital Satisfaction and Stability in the 2010s: Challenging Conventional Wisdom. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(1), 100–116. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12635>
- Katz, R., & Briger, R. (1988). Modernity and the Quality of Marriage in Israel: The Impact of Socio-Cultural Factors on Marital Satisfaction. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 19(3), 371–380. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41601967>
- Kaya, Z., Kocabıyık, O. O., & Bacioğlu, S. D. (2021). Marriage, and Marital Problems and Solutions from the Perspective of Couples in Arranged Marriage. *Opus Uluslararası Toplum Araştırmaları Dergisi*. <https://doi.org/10.26466/opus.898866>
- Kepler, A. (2015). Marital Satisfaction: The Impact of Premarital and Couples Counseling. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University repository website: [https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw\\_papers/474](https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/474)
- Klinnert, M. D., Booster, G., Copeland, M., Darr, J. M., Meltzer, L. J., Miller, M., Oland, A., Perry, S., Wise, B. K., & Bender, B. G. (2017). Role of behavioral health in management of pediatric atopic dermatitis. *Annals of Allergy Asthma & Immunology*, 120(1), 42-48.e8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anai.2017.10.023>
- Larson, J. H. (2003). *The great marriage tune-up book*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lavner, J. A., Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (2016). Does Couples' Communication Predict Marital Satisfaction, or Does Marital Satisfaction Predict Communication? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 78(3), 680–694. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12301>
- Markman, H. J., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Peterson, K. M. (2013). A randomized clinical trial of the effectiveness of premarital intervention: Moderators of divorce outcomes. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 27(1), 165–172. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031134>
- Miller, R.B., Nunes, N.A., Bean, R.A., Day, R.D., Falceto, O.G., Hollist, C.S., & Fernandes, C.L. (2014). Marital Problems and Marital Satisfaction Among Brazilian Couples. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 42, 153 - 166.
- Mirzadeh, M., & Fallahchay, R. (2012). The relationship between forgiveness and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Life Science and Biomedicine*, 2(6), 278-282. <http://jlsb.science-line.com/>
- Onu, D. (2024). The five stages of marriage and how to cope (with Video) -

- David Onu. *David Onu*.  
<https://davidonu.com/stages-of-marriage/>
- Sanchez, C., & Mota, C. (2023). Indicators Related to Marital Dissatisfaction. *Healthcare*, 11(13), 1959. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11131959>
- Shadish, W. R., & Baldwin, S. A. (2003). Meta-analysis of Mft Interventions. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 29(4), 547–570. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0606.2003.tb01694.x>
- Storaasli, R. D., & Markman, H. J. (1990). Relationship problems in the early stages of marriage: A longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 4, 80–98.
- Suminta, R., & Ghufon, M. (2022). The Gratitude and Marital Satisfaction in the Infertile Spouses. *Psikis: Journal Psikologi Islami*, 8, 192–202. 10.19109/psikis.v8i2.7480.
- Uecker, J. E. (2012). Marriage and mental health among young adults. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 53(1), 67–83. doi: 10.1177/0022146511419206
- Wazir, S., Bashir, S., & Ghaffar, I. (2020). Indicators of Marital Satisfaction in Married Couples. *Journal of Professional & Applied Psychology*, 1(1), 39–48. <https://doi.org/10.52053/jpap.v1i1.2>
- Whisman, M. A., Dixon, A. E., & Johnson, B. (1997). Therapists' perspectives of couple problems and treatment issues in couple therapy. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 11 (3), 361–366. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.11.3.361>