Journal of Marriage & Family Studies

Impact of Sense of Humor on Subjective Happiness and Psychological Distress among Married Individuals

Khizra Iqbal^{1*}, Samira Rafiq², Aleeza Javaid³, Faisal Hayat Khan⁴

Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate the influence of sense of humor on subjective happiness and psychological distress among married individuals. Data was collected by using the humor style questionnaire, the depression anxiety stress scale, and the subjective happiness scale. Participants were married individuals (N=250). Non-probability convenient sampling was employed for participant selection. The study findings reveal significant association of humor with subjective happiness and psychological distress. Specifically, negative relationship between sense of humor and psychological distress was found and a positive correlation with subjective happiness was found. The results further demonstrate a significant impact of sense of humor on psychological distress and subjective happiness. In examining the influence of demographic variables such as gender differences indicates significant differences in the sense of humor, subjective happiness, and psychological distress. These findings contribute valuable insights into how various demographic factors may interact with and influence individuals' sense of humor, happiness, and in improving psychological well-being in marital life.

Key Words: Humor, Married Individuals, Psychological Distress, Subjective Happiness

^{1*}Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Nishtar Medical University and Hospital, Multan, Pakistan.

²Lecturer, Department of Applied Psychology, University of Sahiwal, Pakistan.

³Psychologist, Department of Population Welfare, Khanewal, Pakistan.

⁴MPhil Scholar, Department of Psychology, Institute of Southern Punjab, Multan, Pakistan.

***Corresponding Author Email:** khizraiqbal018@gmail.com

Introduction

The role of humor in the happiness and stress levels of married couples is quite complex. Humor acts as a valuable tool to cope with stress and can create a positive atmosphere in a relationship. When couples share laughter, it helps them navigate tough situations, reduce tension, and ultimately contributes to subjective happiness while lowering psychological distress. Using humor in communication fosters a more open and positive dialogue between partners. Couples expressing themselves through humor often find it easier to handle conflicts and discuss sensitive topics, creating a healthier emotional environment (Satıcı & Deniz, 2020). Couples who engage in shared laughter and playful interactions tend to enjoy their relationship more. Whether it's incorporating humor into daily activities or sharing special moments of laughter, the joy derived from these shared experiences enhances happiness. subjective However, it's essential to recognize that the impact of humor varies among individuals and couples due to different preferences and perceptions of humor. The appropriateness and timing of humor also play crucial roles in its effectiveness within a relationship. While having a sense of humor is a positive factor, it's not a cure-all. Other elements, such as communication skills, mutual respect, and support, significantly contribute to the overall well-being of a married couple. In cases where persistent challenges arise, including issues related to happiness and psychological distress, couples therapy or counseling can be beneficial (Hall, 2017).

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 Authors (2024)

Humor is an integral part of human social interaction, often regarded as a valuable trait in personal relationships, including marriage. It is a multidimensional construct that encompasses the ability to create, perceive, and appreciate humor, and it has been linked to various positive psychological outcomes. Subjective happiness and psychological distress are two critical aspects of mental health that can be significantly influenced by one's of humor (Grangvist, sense 2014). Subjective happiness, defined as an individual's self-assessment of their overall happiness, is a significant indicator of psychological well-being. Studies have shown that individuals with a good sense of humor tend to report higher levels of subjective happiness (Martin et al., 2003). Humor can serve as a coping mechanism, helping individuals to view life stressors from a less threatening perspective, thereby enhancing their overall sense of well-being (Ford et al., 2016). Psychological distress encompasses symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Humor has been identified as a protective factor against psychological distress, with research indicating that individuals who utilize humor as a coping strategy experience lower levels of depression and anxiety (Abel, 2002). In the context of marriage, humor can alleviate tensions and conflicts, reducing the overall stress experienced by partners (Vollmann et al., 2019). Marital relationships can benefit significantly from humor, as it enhances communication, fosters intimacy, and helps partners navigate through conflicts more effectively (Butzer & Kuiper, 2008; Friedman & Friedman, 2019).

A recent study by McCosker and Moran (2020) indicates that individuals who use humor as a coping mechanism experience lower levels of depression and anxiety. Addressing marital distress involves building or rebuilding essential skills for a healthy marriage, such as effective communication, problem-solving, and managing conflicts without causing harm. Marital therapy focuses on helping partners see each other as individuals, understand each other's perspectives, negotiate differences, and accept those that cannot be changed (Midlarsky, 2020). Demirci and Odaci (2020) explored how the sense of humor in married individuals relates to their subjective and happiness well-being, marital adjustment, and psychological satisfaction. They found that having a compatible humor plays a intervening role in the relationship between humor and subjective well-being, affecting both marital adjustment and psychological satisfaction.

Ford et al. (2016) discovered that use of positive humor styles (self-enhancing and affiliative) and avoid negative ones (selfdefeating and aggressive) in daily lives tend to happy people. This suggests that the way people use humor is linked to their overall happiness. Previous studies revealed that numerous psychological factors relating to confidence. motivation. positive temperament, concentration and social support influenced stress hardiness and performance relationships (Moreno Fortes et al; 2020). Furthermore, humor was considered as a positive attribute according to hardiness-based approaches. So, in hardiness perspective both positive and negative aspects of humor is acknowledged and recommended (Robbins, 2008).

Significance of the Study

Sense of humor play a significant role in maintain close relationships, especially in marital life. Current study conducted to investigate the association among sense of humor as coping strategy, psychological and subjective happiness. distress Previously, studies considered humor as positive and adaptive temperament or disposition. Investigating the association among sense of humor as a coping strategy, psychological distress, and subjective happiness is an intriguing topic. Previous researches do not adequately address how comorbid conditions or the severity of psychological distress may influence the effectiveness of humor as a coping strategy. Research in this area could help identify for whom and under what conditions humor is

most beneficial. Humor and happiness is very important in daily life of the spouses as these emotions leads positive impact on marital life as well as laughter and humor is strongly associated with good adjustment positive emotions and and marital satisfaction. Aim of present study was to explore the impact of humor on reducing psychological distress and on increasing subjective happiness in married individuals.

Objectives of the Study

- 1. To assess the relationship and impact of sense of humor on subjective happiness and psychological distress
- 2. To measure the difference of Sense of humor, subjective happiness and psychological distress in term of gender differences.

Methods

Research Design

The cross-sectional research design with quantitative methodology was used in this research.

Participants

The participants were consisted on 300 married individuals (Male =172, female= 128). Age range of participants was 25 to 50 years. Convenient sampling technique was used to collect data.

Instruments

Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) Martin et al. (2003) developed a Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) comprised on 32 self-explanatory statements; each one of them defined a specific usage of humor. Participants assessed the extent to which these statements aligned with their own characteristics on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 starting from "Totally Disagree" to "Totally Agree" respectively. This questionnaire measured the scores of four distinctive humor styles i.e., Self-defeating Humor, Affiliative Humor, Aggressive Humor and Self-enhancing Humors. The reliability of this scale is evident through internal consistencies ranging from 0.77 to 0.81. as well as robust test-retest reliabilities from 0.80 to 0.85.

Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) was constructed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper in 1999, is a self-descriptive test consisting four items designed to evaluate an individual's overall happiness through selfevaluation. The 7-point likert scale was applied on participants to express their level of happiness. SHS scores range from 1.0 to 7.0 reflecting higher level of happiness.

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21)

DASS was not designed as a specific tool to diagnose anxiety and depression, despite its ability to identify them. Some major symptoms of depression like sleep, appetite and sexual disturbance are not covered by DASS and they should be assessed separately. DASS 21 is a smaller version of DASS 42, so the outcome of each group (Depression, Anxiety and Stress) must be multiplied by two. Cronbach's α for DASS-21 is 0.90 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

Procedure

The sample of study was individually approach by researcher. As the sample of research were married individuals so all the males and females were approached in their houses, parks, shops and other places like university. The participants were already informed about the purpose of study. Some details were already given to individuals like those written in informed consent like about to complete the questionnaire honestly and the details given by the individual remains confidential. But some participants missed some details like name, age, residence area or questions from questionnaire. After getting the data, the scouring of questionnaire and statistical analysis of data were made. After processing the statistical analysis, the result was made. In the last conclusion was to drown implication of study, limitations and suggestion were made for the betterment of research and to get more benefits from the results.

Results Table 1

Demographic	Frequency	Demographic	Frequency
	(percentage)		(percentage)
Age		Gender	
25-40	167(61.2)	Male	139(50.9)
41-55	83(30.4)	female	111(40.7)
Education	· · ·	Family System	. ,
Matric	19(7.0)	Joint	94(34.4)
Intermediate	85(31.1)	Nuclear	156(57.1)
Graduation	115(42.2)	Residence	
Post-Graduation	31(11.4)	Urban	99(36.3)
Marriage		Rural	151(55.3)
Arranged	76(27.8)		· /
marriage			
Love Marriage	172(63.0)		

Demographics	Characteristics of	of the Particina	nts (N=250)
Demographies	Character istics (<i>y</i> inc i arncipa	110 [11 230]

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients among Humor, Psychological Distress and Subjective Happiness (N=250)

16**	09	00	1 4 4
	07	08	.14*
	.08	.26**	10
		.44**	.04
			056
			44**

p*<.05, *p*<.01

Sense of humor is negatively correlate with stress, anxiety and depression and positively correlate with subjective happiness. Stress is positively correlate with anxiety and depression and negatively correlate with subjective happiness. Anxiety is positively correlate with depression and with subjective happiness also positively correlate. Depression is negatively correlate with subjective happiness.

Table 3

Regression Analysis for Effect of Sense of Humor on Stress, Anxiety and Depression (N=250)

	0 00	J J		/ /	
Predictor	B	SE	β	t	р
Constant	3.16	.258	169	12.23	.000
Sense of Humor	045	.017			
Constant	2.54	.175	096	15.54	.000
Sense of humor	017	.011			
Constant	2.77	.353	085	7.86	.000
Sense of humor	031	.023			
D 1 (D) 00 1 1	1 - 2		.		

 $R=.16, R^2=.02, \text{ Adjusted } R^2=.02, (F(7.32), p<.05)$

 $R=.06, R^2=.007, \text{ Adjusted } R^2=.003, (F(2.31), p < .05)$

 $R=.08, R^2=.009$, Adjusted $R^2=.005, (F(1.78), p<.05)$

Above analysis of regression shows significant impact of humor on stress, anxiety and depression.

Table 4

Predictor	В	SE	ß	t	D	
Regression Analysis fe	or the Effect of	f Sense of Humor	r on Subjective	e Happines:	s (N=250)	

(Constant)	2.79	.46		5.97	.000
Humor	.07	.03	.14	2.32	.02
$R=.14, R^2=.02, \text{ Adjusted } R^2$	= .01, (F(.37))	, <i>p</i> <.05			

Linear regression analysis shows that sense of humor has significant impact on subjective happiness.

Table 5

t- Test for Gender Differences in Sense of Humor, Psychological Distress and Subjective Happiness (N=250)

	M±SD			
Variables	Male (<i>n</i> =139) Female(<i>n</i> =111)		<i>t</i>	р
Sense of Humor	16.23±(1.62)	15.49±(1.33)	-1.24	.002
Subjective Happiness	3.71±(.57)	3.62± (.734)	1.09	.002
Stress	2.45± (.451)	2.48± (.299)	66	-
Anxiety	2.27±(.236)	2.32± (.333)	-1.37	.50 .17
Depression	2.15± (.521)	2.63± (.49)	-6.77	.000

Results showed that there was significant difference among males (M=15.37, SD=1.22) and females (M=15.24, SD=1.85) on sense of humor. Level of sense of humor is greater in males as compared to females. Results showed that there was significant difference among males (M=3.67, SD=.67) and females (M=3.62, SD=.55) on subjective happiness. Level of subjective happiness is higher in male as compared to female. Results showed that there was no significant difference among males

Discussion

The present research aimed to explore how a sense of humor impacts on subjective happiness and psychological distress, specifically stress, anxiety, and depression. (M=2.46, SD=.31) and females (M=2.46, SD=.50) on stress and there is no effect size. Results also indicate that there was no significant difference among males (M=2.23, SD=.29) and females (M=2.34, SD=.23). Results described that there was significant difference among males (M=2.27, SD=.64) and females (M=2.34, SD=.41) on depression. Level of depression is more in female as compare to male.

The study encompasses diverse participants in terms of age, education, family structure, residence, and marital status. After collecting data, a significant correlation analysis reveals that sense of humor was inversely associated with psychological distress i.e., stress, anxiety and depression. On the other hand, humor was positively correlated with subjective happiness. Happiness was also negatively associated with psychological distress. In similar vein, Rnic et al. (2016) explored the relationships among distorted thinking, the utilization of humor, and depressive symptoms. Their findings revealed noteworthy negative correlations between the manifestation of depressive symptoms and both aggression and the self-enhancing application of humor. Similarly Replicated studies, such as Martin et al. (2003), consistently shows a positive correlation between happiness and humor styles. Studies have consistently demonstrated negative correlation а between a sense of humor and stress levels. suggesting a potential protective effect.

The linear regression analysis in the present research demonstrates that a sense of humor significantly influences stress. For instance. exposure to humor, like watching a comedy program, can shift a person's mood from stress to a more pleasant state. The analysis also indicates a significant impact on anxiety, suggesting that individuals with a sense of humor tend to remain happy and can effectively calm themselves. Similarly, the linear regression analysis highlights a significant impact on depression, emphasizing that individuals with a good sense of humor are less prone to experiencing unhappiness and irritability associated with depression. Psychological theories propose that humor acts as a coping mechanism by influencing cognitive appraisals of stressors (Martin et al., 2003). Furthermore, the research indicates a significant impact of sense of humor on subjective happiness. The analysis underscores that individuals with a humorous disposition tend to experience higher levels of subjective happiness. The results suggest that a person's mood can shift from stress to pleasant through exposure to humor, supporting the idea that sense of humor influences stress levels. This aligns with Cann et al. (2010) perspective based on Broaden and build

theory by Frederickson's formulated that the adaptive humor contributes positive affect and strengthens the hardiness and improve overall wellbeing and happiness. Humor-based interventions, such as laughter therapy and humor appreciation programs, have demonstrated efficacy in enhancing subjective happiness these interventions leverage the positive effects of humor to improve mood and overall well-being. When applying t-tests to examine gender differences in sense of psychological distress. humor, and subjective happiness, the results show significant disparities. While there is no significant difference between males and females in terms of stress, females exhibit levels of higher anxiety and depression. Subjective happiness is higher in males, and sense of humor is also greater in males to females. Cross-cultural compared research has contributed valuable insights into the universality of the gender-stress relationship. Studies such as those conducted by Harrell and Karim (2008) and Yip (2016) across diverse cultural contexts have found no significant gender-based in reported stress variations levels. Numerous studies consistently report higher prevalence rates of anxiety and depression in females compared to males (Altemus, Sarvaiya, & Epperson, 2014; Koops et al., 2017). The significance of this gender disparity raises questions about the underlying factors contributing to the observed differences. Dobson and Dozois (2008) also found similar findings that, on average. men reported greater life satisfaction compared to women. Similarly, a cross-cultural study by Lucas and Diener (2008) observed a consistent trend of higher subjective well-being in males across various countries. Several studies have suggested that males may be perceived as having a greater sense of humor compared to females. For example, a cross-cultural study by Cann et al. (2010) reported gender differences in humor styles, with males displaying higher levels of aggressive and self-enhancing humor. Conclusively, it is essential to acknowledge that our examination of fundamental mechanisms through which humor styles influence psychological distress and subjective experiences in married individuals. A parallel study conducted by Campbell et al. (2008) yielded similar insights, revealing that adopting a self-enhancing humor style correlates with heightened levels of optimism, hope. happiness. and Consequently, this positive shift is associated with a reduction in perceived stress. Evidently, humor appears to facilitate the cultivation or stimulation of positive personality traits that contribute to effective coping with life's stressors.

Conclusion

As the research was conducting on the influence of sense of humor on subjective happiness and psychological distress the basic findings of research are positive relationship among subjective happiness, sense of humor and negative relationship of psychological distress (stress, anxiety and depression) with both subjective happiness and sense of humor. It was concluded that sense of humor has significant effect on stress, anxiety, depression and subjective happiness. Findings revealed that humor minimizes the chances of divorce and encourages the healthy relationships among couples because of its ability to reduce tensions during conflicts.

Implications

There should be some awareness program for reducing marital conflicts among individuals. Media is most powerful tools now a days there must be some awareness program and talk shows on television to discuss marital issues and other psychological problem and provide some useful suggestion to adjust marital life

Limitation and Recommendations

The scope of this study provides some essential limitations, despite the importance to compare the outcomes on different humor styles between married and divorced couples. Married couples remained free from any kind of influences while providing their feedbacks. Current study was made only on married individuals. The findings may not be directly applicable to individuals who are not married. The aspects of sense of humor and its psychological impacts could differ among unmarried individuals. The research focused on specific aspects of humor styles without considering a broader spectrum. Different types of humor (affiliative, selfenhancing, and aggressive) could have varying effects on psychological distress and subjective happiness. These limitations highlighted that future study must be precisely focused, preferably longitudinal designs and incorporating behavioral as well as observational assessment. The similar hypotheses should be designed regarding the correlation

be designed regarding the correlation among humor styles and the quality of divorced members during their marriages. Examining particular humorous responses in interaction provides an insight how humor influences on interpersonal relationships. Additionally, exploring the effectiveness of media-based interventions in reducing marital conflicts and promoting psychological well-being could be a fruitful avenue for further investigation.

Contribution of Authors

Khizra Iqbal: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing

Samira Rafiq: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing

Aleeza Javaid: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft

Faisal Hayat Khan: Conceptualization, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

Source of Funding

The authors declared no source of funding. Data Availability Statement

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but are available from the corresponding author [K.I.] upon the reasonable request.

- Abel, M. H. (2002). Humor, stress, and coping strategies. *Humor*, 15(4), 365-381.
- Altemus, M., Sarvaiya, N., & Epperson, C. N. (2014). Sex differences in anxiety and depression clinical perspectives. *Frontiers in Neuroendocrinology*, 35(3), 320-330.
- Butzer, B., & Kuiper, N. A. (2008). Humor use in romantic relationships: The effects of relationship satisfaction pleasant versus conflict and The situations. Journal of Psychology. 142(3), 245-260. https://doi.org/10.3200/JRLP.142.3 .245-260
- Campbell, L., Martin, R. A., & Ward, J. R. (2008). An observational study of humor use while resolving conflict in dating couples. *Personal Relationships*, 15(1), 41-55. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2007.00183.x
- Cann, A., Norman, M. A., Welbourne, J. L.,
 & Calhoun, L. G. (2010).
 Attachment styles, conflict styles, and humor styles: Interrelationships and associations with relationship satisfaction. *European Journal of Personality*, 24(1), 3-23.
- Demirci, M., & Odaci, H. (2020). The Evaluation of the Relationships Between Subjective Well-Being Level of Married Individuals, Humor Styles, Satisfaction of Basic Psychological Needs, and Marital Adjustment. *Turkish Psychological Counseling and Guidance Journal*, 10(58), 435-455.
- Dobson, K. S., & Dozois, D. J. (2008). Historical and philosophical bases of the cognitive-behavioral therapies. In D. H. Barlow (Ed.), Clinical handbook of psychological disorders: A step-by-step treatment manual (4th ed., pp. 3-38). Guilford Press.
- Ford, T.E., Lappi, S.K & Holden, C.J. (2016). Personality, Humor Styles

and Happiness: Happy People Have Positive Humor Styles. *European Journal of Psychology*, *12*(3), 320– 337. doi: 10.5964/ejop.v12i3.1160

- Friedman, H. H., & Friedman, L. W. (2019). Laughing matters: When humor is meaningful. Journal of Intercultural Management and Ethics, 23(4), 55-72. https://doi.org/10.35478/jime.2019. 4.06
- Granqvist, P. (2014). Mental health and religion from an attachment viewpoint: overview with implications for future research. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture, 17*(8), 777–793.
- Hall, J. A. (2017). Humor in romantic relationships: A meta-analysis. *Personal Relationships, 24*(2), 306-322. doi: 10.1111/pere.12183
- Harrell, S. P., & Karim, N. M. (2008). A comparison of Muslims and Christians in the Philadelphia area: Religious affiliation, practices and beliefs. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *31*(2), 287-322.
- Koops, J. C., Liefbroer, A. C., & Gauthier,
 A. H. (2017). The influence of parental educational attainment on the partnership context at first birth in 16 Western societies. *European Journal of Population*, 33, 533–557.
- Lovibond, S. H., & Lovibond, P. F. (1995). Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS--21, DASS--42) [Database record]. APA PsycTests. https://doi.org/10.1037/t01004-000
- Lucas, R. E., & Diener, E. (2008). Subjective well-being. In M. Lewis, J. M. Haviland-Jones, & L. F. Barrett (Eds.), Handbook of emotions. Guilford Press.
- Lyubomirsky, S., & Lepper, H. S. (1999). A measure of subjective happiness: Preliminary reliability and construct validation. *Social Indicators Research, 46*(2), 137–

155. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:100 6824100041

- Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. (2003). Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire. Journal of Research in Personality, 37(1), 48-75.
- McCosker, M. M., & Moran, C. C. (2020). The impact of humor on psychological well-being in romantic relationships. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 21(6), 2341-2358.
- Midlarsky E (2020) Marital and Psychological Distress in Relationship. International Journal of Mental Health Psychiatry, 6(3). DOI:

10.37532/ijmhp.2020.6(3).e102

Moreno Fortes, A., Tian, L., & Huebner, E.
S. (2020) Occupational stress and employees complete mental health:
a cross-cultural empirical study. *International Journal of Environmental Research*, 17, 36-29.

- Rnic, K., Dozois, D. J., & Martin, R. A. (2016). Cognitive Distortions, Humor Styles, and Depression. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 12(3), 348–362. https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v12i3. 1118
- Robbins, B. D. (2008) What is the good life? Positive psychology and the renaissance of humanistic psychology. *The Humanistic Psychologist, 36*, 96-112.
- Satıcı,B & Deniz,E.(2020). Relational Humor and Marital Satisfaction in Married Individuals. *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies*, 7(2), 72-78
- Vollmann, M., Sprang, S., & van den Brink,
 F. (2019). Adult attachment and relationship satisfaction: The mediating role of gratitude toward the partner. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 36(11-12), 3875–3886.
- Yip, T. (2016). The effects of ethnic/racial discrimination and sleep quality on depressive symptoms and self-esteem trajectories among diverse adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 45*(6), 1292-1307.