

Effect of Marital Adjustment in Middle-Aged Adults

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Abstract- The purpose of the present investigation is to analyze marital & emotional adjustment in middle aged couples. The sample consisted of 124 respondents, out of which 62 were males and 62 females (mean age= 50 to 65), who were financially independent from their offspring. To measure adjustment Old-age Adjustment Inventory (SJOAI) created by Dr. Shamshad Hussain and Dr. Jasbir Kaur was used. The inventory measures problems of marital & emotional adjustment faced by middle aged couples. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-test analysis. There were found significant differences between two genders (male and female) in the marital & emotional adjustment. The result of the study revealed that there is a significant impact on males' as well as females' adjustment level.

Keywords: Marital adjustment, emotional adjustment, middle aged couples.

I. INTRODUCTION

Middle life is generally a time period of higher fulfillment, better health, more authority and greater financial stability than any other stage of life. Adults in middle life may care and support responsibilities for both younger generations (children who are not quite on their own) and older generations (parents who are starting to decline). There are physical and psychosocial changes associated with this time period that is different for women and for men. However, a primary change in thinking that defines middle life for both women and men is the real belief in mortality (ushered in by body sensations, major illnesses, or death of parent) coupled with an acceptance of the shrinkage of possibilities for the future. Individuals who feel stress associated with this process may go through "mid-life crisis".

Mid-life crisis is a controversial issue; some people believe in it and others think it is a myth. It is generally considered as the result from recognition that future possibilities have diminished and all goals and dreams set earlier in life will not be met. For some people this does not cause stress and results in a sense of relief and no crisis. Others focus on mortality, become attached to the idea that more time has gone by than remains, see the beginnings of physical decline, and feel stress at the fact that they are not where they want to be in life. This stress may lead to actual grief and depression. These people make seemingly dramatic changes, searching for youth, new relationships, and/or new careers in an attempt to get to where they want to be in life. People who argue against the concept of mid-life crisis believe that this generally takes place with people who are more restless to begin with, that these changes are consistent with the person's tendencies upon self-reflection, and there is no change in personality.

When people come in the age group of 40-65 years, most of them are financially secure. They have children who are almost independent. People during this period of their life are at the best of their health physiologically, happy, content and peaceful. It is hard to deny the fact that during this phase of life people get more stressed. It is a transition period. There are changes in physical appearance along with emotional and physiological changes in the body. The exterior look of an individual changes slowly. At this stage of life children get settled elsewhere and the house gets vacated. Many couples consider this to be a difficult period of their life. Though for some it is different, it is a time when success speaks. At this phase of life the middle aged couples rise up in their career, enjoying authority and prestige. For many this may be a period of financial as well as social success and well-being.

Comprehensive study of husbands and wives investigated some of the factors that contributed to marital satisfaction. Some of their findings revealed existing social, cultural, educational level the greater satisfaction. Occupation and income, which are often thought to be associated with levels of satisfaction, have no relationship with it. The number of children too affects marital satisfaction. There is evidence that the pressures of managing multiple roles in women are the greatest, and the psychological benefits of employment are the least, under conditions of heavy family responsibilities that is, when young children are at home. But beyond specific factors such as these, what is important to marital satisfaction over the course of marriage is the ability of partner to adjust to a variety of changes and to cope with a number of stresses. Marital role can be defined as set of attitudes and behaviors a spouse is expected to demonstrate in the content of the marriage relationship. A marital role comprises cultural expectations associated with the husband or with a wife. A husband is considered as head of family while wife is expected to make home and companion, or the wife may be expected to be the strong one, upon whom the husband can rely.

Perhaps half of the adults suffering from severe stress blame the deteriorating relationships on their spouse. Looking at the growing rate of divorces, court cases for alimony, physical abuses and single parents; it does seem as if handling a relationship can be a tricky and often taxing issue. The possible causes can be endless. More often than not, stress arising from marital relationships is manifested in chronic disorders such as depression, insomnia and hypertension. Since a relationship depends on the nature of the persons involved, it helps to seek the middle path when the inherent individual differences surface. It often helps to change one's attitude, go for counseling or talk openly with your spouse about problems facing your relationship.

Depression in a spouse is an issue that most couples will face at some point in their marriage. Depression is a normal and natural response to loss or grief, whether a death, separation from a loved one, job loss, loss of physical health, or relocation. Marital distress and relationship conflict also contribute to depression. Symptoms of depression include feelings of sadness, hopelessness, helplessness, anxiety, irritability, agitation, fatigue, low energy, and a reduced activity level are common, and there is also withdrawal from social contact and loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities, including sex. There may be changes in appetite, weight or sleep patterns, memory problems or difficulty concentrating. Often there are feelings of worthlessness or inadequacy and a lowered sense of self-esteem. In more serious cases there may be suicidal thoughts or a feeling that "life is not worth living" (Comer, 1996). Married women have higher rates of depression than unmarried women, but the reverse is true for men. Marriage seems to confer a greater protective advantage on men than on women. Marital adjustment and depression are strongly related. In a research, collected data on 695 women and 530 men and then re-interviewed them up to 1 year later. During this a number of participants separated from or divorced their spouses though the majority reported stable marriages. Approximately 21% of the women who reported marital split during the study experienced severe depression, a rate three times higher than that from women.

Married couples with vital relationships are most likely to experience continued, positive interactions within marriage. Those who enjoy spending time together and can confide in each other usually maintain a close and giving relationship as they age. However, those couples who are unsatisfied in the earlier years of their marriage tend to have a negative experience in later life. Their relationships are difficult, their communication conflictual and unrewarding.

There is often a shift in roles between women and men in middle life called the midlife cross-over that strongly affects marriage. At middle adulthood, there is a direct reversal as women come into their own with greater importance placed on work/career and personal goals and men become more aware or more needful of intimacy. While divorces are most common during the first 4-7yrs of a marriage, the second most frequent period is at midlife. Divorce is often linked to infidelity with 60-70% of men and 20-30% of women engaging in infidelity at some point in life. There is a high rate of remarriage in midlife, especially among men.

The two-career partners are more challenged and are required to make greater efforts and adjustments while attempting to strike a balance between the simultaneous demands and pressures of two important areas, viz. their careers and their family. The study by Elloy & Smith (2003) shows that dual career couples experience higher levels of stress, family conflict, overload, role ambiguity and role conflict than single career couples. The risk for conflict between the two roles becomes all the more serious because individuals in such relationships have to face simultaneous and conflicting demands and pressures of two careers with that of family (Adams, King, & King, 1996, Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992).

Moss and Schwebel (1993) found 61 unique definitions of intimacy. Definitions have ranged from being simple and one-dimensional to complex and multidimensional. Early research often defined intimacy as self-disclosure, or simply being married. More recent research has conceptualized intimacy as consisting of many dimensions, for example love, sexuality, and emotional disclosure. It has also been acknowledged that intimacy may exist in friendships and other non-romantic relationships.

Prager (1995) proposed a multi-component definition of intimacy which incorporates aspects of many of the existing conceptualizations. Prager believes that intimacy has both a behavioural and emotional component. The behavioural component consists of activities which people engage in together, such as touching and talking, whereas the emotional component inches feelings of love and togetherness. The relationship of intimacy to marital satisfaction and sexuality has not been clearly identified. Generally, however, researchers agreed that intimacy is related to these concepts. It also appears that the emotional component of intimacy is the most important in the prediction of marital satisfaction (Schaefer & Olson, 1981; Tolstedt & Stokes, 1983). Feeling understood by and loved by one's partner seems to be an integral part of satisfactory marriages for both men and women. The relationship of intimacy to sexuality is even less clear than that of intimacy to marital satisfaction. Research has shown that intimacy is related to sexual satisfaction, however the extent of the relationship, and how specific intimacy dimensions affect sexuality has rarely been studied (Patton & Waring, 1985; Fortin & Theriault, 1995).

II. MID-AGE ADJUSTMENTS

It is important to adjust naturally with the transitions that occur both physically and mentally. There are challenges which should be met and coped with successfully. At this age it is good to look at the world with new prospective and changed interests. Some may find this adjustment stage really difficult and hard to cope with. Following are some of these important changes and adjustments which are faced in middle age.

A. Marital Adjustment

It can be seen that the phenomenon of marital adjustment is given a priority in all cultures, as marriage is one of the most important commitment of an individual makes in his or her life. A good marriage not only produces a satisfied life but it also generates a sense of well-being. In west, marriage is often considered as the centerpiece in ideological claims about the 'decline of family values'. Marital adjustment has been related to personality, job & home stresses, mental illness, depression, education, sex role attitude, happiness and success in life.

Sinha and Mukerjee (1990), defines marital adjustment as, "the state in which there is an overall feeling between husband and wife, of happiness and satisfaction with their marriage and with each other."

All the marriages are aimed at happiness in one or another way. Most couples marry filled up with expectations. Some of the expectations will be realistic while others unrealistic. Marital adjustment calls for maturity that accepts and understands growth and

development in the spouse. If this growth is not experienced and realized fully, death in marital relationship is inevitable. A relationship between couples is not instantaneous rather a slow progress.

There is a list of six areas of marital adjustment, which is defined by the psychologist, such as, religion, social life, mutual friends, in laws, money and sex. Another psychologist defines ten areas of marital adjustment, i.e. values, couple growth, communication, conflict resolution, affection, roles, cooperation, sex, money and parenthood. A study on marriage and marital adjustment in USA presents social activities and recreation, training and disciplining of children, religion, in law relationship, financial matters, sexual relationship, communication, mutual trust and companionship as the areas of marital adjustment.

B. Emotional Adjustment

Emotional behaviors expressed by couples differed as a function of age, gender, and marital satisfaction. The intensity of the middle-age intimacy crisis depends on the need-satisfaction of the relationship and particularly on the success achieved in the previous stages of intimacy. Older adults are biased toward the positive aspects of close relationships (Story, Nathan T. et. al 2007), emotionally positive and responsive listening one of the key to successful conflict resolution in marriage (Pasupathi, Monisha et. al. 1999).

Carl Jung described the developmental task of the second half of life as the need to develop neglected inner resources and enrich the inner life which may result in the impoverishment of the inner life - the world of feelings, values and inner creativity. Failure to accept the changes may lead to grievously traumatic situations like mental illness, use of drugs, addiction problems, alcoholism and at times suicide or homicide.

In older couples, the resolution of conflict was less emotionally negative and more affectionate than in middle-aged marriages. Differences between husbands and wives and between happy and unhappy marriages were also found. Wives were more affectively negative than husbands, whereas husbands were more defensive than wives, and unhappy marriages involved greater exchange of negative affect than happy marriages.

Couples engage in naturalistic discussions about important topics related to their relationship. These interactions are studied to determine if there are signs in emotional experience, behavior, language, and physiology that can be used to discriminate between the interactions of couples who are satisfied and dissatisfied with their relationships, to discriminate between couples at different stages of the life span, and to predict what will happen to the level of couples' relationship satisfaction over time. What kinds of couples fare well as they cope with these transitions and what kinds of couples fare poorly.

Unlike many other aspects of human functioning which show pronounced declines with age (e.g., memory, psychomotor skills), many aspects of emotional functioning appear to be relatively spared as we age, and some even show signs of continuing improvement and positive development in late life.

Adams, Gary et al. (1996) data came from 163 workers who were living with at least 1 family member. Results suggested that relationships between work and family can have an important effect on job and life satisfaction and that the level of involvement the worker assigns to work and family roles is associated with this relationship. The results also suggested that the relationship between work and family can be simultaneously characterized by conflict and support. Higher levels of work interfering with family predicted lower levels of family emotional and instrumental support. Higher levels of family emotional and instrumental support were associated with lower levels of family interfering with work.

Daniel Shek (1999) perceived health status in 378 Chinese married couples over 2 years was examined. Results showed that marital adjustment and marital satisfaction were concurrently related to midlife crisis symptoms, life satisfaction, and perceived health suggest that the relationships between marital quality and health measures are bidirectional in nature. While marital quality predicted changes in midlife crisis symptoms in husbands, but not in wives, marital quality predicted changes in perceived health status in wives, but not in husbands. Results also showed that mental health influenced the marital adjustment of the wives, but not the husbands, over time.

Skowron and Elizabeth (2000) this American study based on couples' levels of differentiation explained substantial variance in marital adjustment: 74% of variance in husband marital adjustment scores and 61 % of variance in wife marital adjustment scores were accounted for by couple differentiation of self-scores. Greater husband emotional cutoff uniquely accounted for husband and wife marital discord. Contrary to family systems theory, actual couples were no more similar on differentiation than were randomly matched couples. Finally, greater complementarity among couples along the specific dimensions of emotional cutoff and emotional reactivity predicted greater marital distress.

Isaac and Shah (2004) in a study based on 20 distressed and 20 non-distressed couples from a marital and family therapy center in the city of Bangalore, India, revealed that: (a) the group as a whole showed greater femininity than masculinity; (b) more non-distressed individuals show high androgyny; (c) androgynous dyads show better marital adjustment; and (d) qualitative analysis suggests a trend for couples to move towards more gender-neutral constructions of marriage, indicating a link between androgyny and marital adjustment and type of match between dyads.

Story, Nathan et al (2007) this American study based on 270 middle-aged (40-50 years old) and older (60-70 years old) couples who discussed a marital disagreement and completed an errand task. The results are consistent with theories of emotion regulation, such as socio emotional selectivity theory, that suggest that older adults are biased toward the positive aspects of close relationships.

Hashmi, Khurshid & Hassan (2007) the study is exploring the relationship between marital adjustment, stress and depression. Sample of the study consisted of 150 working and non-working married women (working married women = 75, non-working married women = 75). Their age ranged between 18 to 50 years. Results indicated highly significant relationship between marital adjustment, depression and stress. The findings of the results also show that working married women have to face more problems in their married

life as compared to non-working married women. The results further show that highly educated working and non-working married women can perform well in their married life and they are free from depression as compared to educated working and non-working married women.

Seider, Herschel (2011) this study examined middle-aged (N = 82) and older (N = 74) couples, in California, engaged in a 15-minute conflict conversation to determine how discrete emotion sequences between spouses were related to marital satisfaction. It further examined whether age and gender moderated the relationships between discrete emotion sequences and marital satisfaction. The study focused on discrete emotion sequences initiated by three antecedent emotions (anger, contempt and sadness) previously associated with distressed marriages. Results revealed significant associations between discrete emotion sequences and marital satisfaction for 11 of the 39 discrete emotion sequences examined. The findings indicated that the relationships between discrete emotion sequences and marital satisfaction did not consistently differ as a function of age, but when they did, they tended to be stronger for older couples. This study revealed important differences in how discrete emotion sequences relate to marital satisfaction.

Dr. Goel and Dr. Narang (2012) this research studied marital adjustment, mental health and frustration reactions in males and females of middle age, from Delhi, India. The sample comprised of 150 males and 150 females (n=300) which are bank employees, doctors and lecturers, within the age range of 40-55 years from Delhi, India. It was seen that Females showed high level of recreational adjustment as compared to males but males were having better group oriented attitude than females.

III. METHODOLOGY

Objectives

1. To study Marital & emotional adjustment in middle aged couples,
2. To study the adjustment pattern in middle aged couples.

Delimitations

- Samples are collected from Banastali University campus, this research is area specific.
- The research is focused upon low income group population, which includes mess workers, watchman, shopkeeper, mechanic, library workers, horse barn workers and gardeners.

Sample

The sample consisted of randomly selected 124 respondents, (62 males and 62 females mean age range= 50 to 65) which are mess workers, watchman, shopkeeper, mechanic, library workers, horse barn workers and gardeners; who are financially independent from their offspring. Subjects from only low socio-economic status were selected. Individuals in this sample were only married couples.

Measures

Old age adjustment inventory, developed by Shamshad Hussain and Jashbir Kaur was used in this study. This inventory was developed for male and female ranging between 50 to 65 years of age belonging to different professions. This 125 items inventory measures the adjustment of old aged people into two areas- marital and emotional. Percentile norms are available sex wise and professional status wise.

Reliability of the Test

The obtained indices of different type of sampling schemes are as follows:

Item Analysis	Reliability	Validity	Norm Construction
N=375	N=100	N=100	N=100

IV. RESULTS

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and t-value of Scores of males and females marital adjustment on SJOAI (Shamshad-Jasbir Old-age Adjustment Inventory) (N=124)

	Gender	Mean	SD	Significance
Marital	Males	11.93548387	2.455311858	0.001***
	Females	9.258064516	4.427690379	

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and t-value of Scores of males and females emotional adjustment on SJOAI (Shamshad-Jasbir Old-age Adjustment Inventory) (N=124)

	Gender	Mean	SD	Significance
Emotional	Males	13.87096774	3.091415247	0.001***
	Females	11.87096774	3.471116752	

(n=100) health, home, social, marital, emotional and financial

***Highly Significant at 0.001level

The table depicts that significant relation of parameters were found in marital and emotional adjustment of males and females in middle aged. Marital and emotional parameters have highly significant relation on marital adjustment in middle aged. As the mean value of marital adjustment in men (11.93) and in female (9.25) and the mean value of emotional adjustment in men (13.87) and in female (11.87) which is higher significant value the indicating that males make high level of adjustment than females.

The mean marital adjustment scores of these two genders were then compared. The Table-1 reveals that there is a significant difference between male and female i.e. high level of marital adjustment in males (Mean value = 11.93 and S.D. = 2.45) and low level of marital adjustment in females (Mean value = 9.25, S.D. = 4.42) in comparison to high companionship of spouse group.

The result of the present study shows the significant at 0.001 level. The investigation therefore concludes that there is a positive significant effect of marital adjustment between males and females.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Working females have to play dual roles as they are employed outside house. They shoulder more responsibilities than males, adjust their time and energy for children, spouse, and household activities, religious and social activities. They seek contentment and recreation out of all these activities performed and makes adjustment accordingly. This can be supported by Powers, Myers and Tingle (2004) studied 83 individuals (42 couples) living in medical marriage. Results revealed that resident spouses scored higher than the general married population on wellness, mattering, and satisfaction with shared marriage values and scored lower on work satisfaction and realistic beliefs. Barling (1986) in a study on "inter role conflict and marital functioning" found that conflict regarding work and family roles was associated with lower levels of marital adjustment among dual earner couples.

In contrast, males are more mentally healthy than females. A balance of psychic forces in the males shows sound mental health. Ability to understand and to share other people's emotions, the ability to concentrate at work and interest in several activities in middle aged males results in good adjustment with spouse and with the family members. They always have an inner feeling to spend quality time with their spouse, take care of and satisfy sexual needs of the partner. They have concern and feel responsible for needs of the family members and for smooth functioning of the family, they are able to make equal role distribution among the family members. They try to maintain balance between family and society. During middle age the males have less family responsibilities (as the children are grown up or settled down) and would also desire to spend some time for social work or welfare activities. It leads to their overall life satisfaction.

Hill (2005) conducted a study on 1,314 individuals and found that work to family facilitation was positively related to job satisfaction and life satisfaction, and negatively related to individual stress. Family to work facilitation was positively related to marital satisfaction, family satisfaction and life satisfaction, and negatively related to organizational commitment. Working fathers reported long work hours (49 hours / week), major involvement in household responsibilities (46 hours / week), and a work culture less supportive of their family life than working mothers reported. However, working fathers reported less individual stress, and greater family satisfaction, and life satisfaction than working mothers.

Principal Implications of the Study

This study has very deep social implications to strength the marital bonds between the working couples. This can help / suggest the following points:

1. The middle aged couples to develop patience and tolerance and understanding for each other.
2. The importance of recreation, role distribution for smooth functioning marriage life.
3. Working couples to owe respect and equality rights to each other regarding financial and family matters with special reference to females.

Suggestions

1. This study was conducted to see the middle age crisis in adulthood regarding effect of marital adjustment. Further investigation may be undertaken to find out other factors affecting marital adjustment in middle adulthood.
2. Sample of present investigation was drawn only from Banasthali University, Rajasthan State of India.
3. Further revitalization programs could be undertaken for the identified martially maladjusted couples.
4. Similar research study can be undertaken on a sample belonging to different communities and cultures like Hindu, Muslim etc.

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