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Impact of Parental Divorce on the Marital Satisfaction of Adult Children” (South Punjab)

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Abstract

This study explores how parental divorce influences the marital satisfaction of adult children in the Pakistani context. Utilizing a quantitative research design, 40 married adults aged between 25 and 40 were selected through purposive sampling and divided into two equal groups based on their parental marital status—divorced or intact. The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale was employed to assess their levels of satisfaction in their own marriages. Findings revealed that individuals whose parents were divorced reported notably lower levels of marital satisfaction compared to those from intact families. An independent samples t-test confirmed a statistically significant difference between the two groups. These results suggest that parental divorce can have a lasting impact on the relational well-being of adult children. The study highlights the significance of family dynamics in shaping future intimate relationships and points toward the importance of psychological support for individuals from divorced family backgrounds.

Keywords:

Parental divorce, marital satisfaction, adult children, family dynamics, psychological well-being.

Introduction

Divorce, defined as the legal dissolution of marriage, has become increasingly prevalent worldwide over recent decades. Global social changes such as urbanization, economic

independence of women, and shifting cultural norms have contributed to a rise in divorce rates (Amato, 2010). While the exact prevalence varies across countries due to cultural, religious, and legal differences, the general trend points towards higher incidences of marital breakdowns in many societies (Cherlin, 2014).

This shift has profound implications for families, particularly children who experience the separation of their parents. The family is the primary socializing agent, where children first learn about relationships, emotional regulation, communication, and conflict resolution. When parents divorce, the family system undergoes disruption, often causing instability in these foundational experiences. Children of divorced parents are more likely to face emotional challenges such as feelings of abandonment, insecurity, and anxiety (Kelly & Emery, 2003). These emotional disturbances can lead to behavioral problems, lower academic achievement, and difficulties in peer relationships during childhood and adolescence (Sun & Li, 2002).

The effects of parental divorce do not end with childhood. Research has shown that many adult children of divorced parents carry emotional and psychological scars into their own adult relationships. They tend to have different attitudes toward marriage, with increased skepticism about marital permanence and reduced trust in partners (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). These altered perspectives can affect their own marital satisfaction — a multidimensional construct that reflects an individual’s overall contentment and happiness within their marriage (Fowers & Olson, 1993). Marital satisfaction includes factors like emotional intimacy, communication quality, conflict management, and mutual support.

Adult children of divorced families often report lower marital satisfaction compared to their peers from intact families (Demo & Acock, 1996). This is attributed to several factors: they may have learned maladaptive relationship behaviors through observation, carry unresolved attachment issues due to parental separation, or hold negative expectations about marriage formed during their upbringing (Liu, 2011). For example, insecure attachment styles developed from inconsistent parental availability may lead to difficulties in trusting a spouse, resulting in higher marital dissatisfaction (Simpson, 1990).

In Pakistan, marriage is not only a personal commitment but a social institution deeply embedded in cultural, religious, and familial values. The family serves as the cornerstone of

social life, with strong emphasis on cohesion, loyalty, and interdependence (Hussain & Sultan, 2010). Although divorce rates have historically been lower in Pakistan compared to Western countries, recent studies suggest a gradual increase in divorce incidences, particularly in urban areas and among educated populations (Ali, 2017). This rise may be linked to changes in socio-economic conditions, gender roles, and increased awareness of individual rights.

Despite the importance of the family in Pakistani society, little research has explored the long-term impact of parental divorce on adult children’s marital satisfaction within this cultural context. Understanding how parental divorce shapes adult marital outcomes is essential for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers to provide appropriate support and interventions. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining whether adult children of divorced parents experience lower marital satisfaction compared to those from intact families in Bahawalpur, Pakistan.

Parental divorce is not only a distressing experience for children during their formative years but also carries substantial long-term consequences that influence various domains of their adult lives. Extensive research indicates that the effects of parental separation extend far beyond childhood and adolescence, shaping emotional well-being, social relationships, and psychological health well into adulthood (Amato, 2000).

One of the most critical long-term impacts is on the emotional and psychological adjustment of adult children. Parental divorce often results in feelings of loss, insecurity, and diminished sense of family cohesion that can persist for years. Many adult children report ongoing emotional struggles such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, which can compromise their ability to form and maintain healthy intimate relationships (Kelly & Emery, 2003). The trauma of parental separation can also contribute to heightened stress sensitivity and difficulties in emotional regulation, making adults more vulnerable to conflicts in their own marriages (Hetherington, 2003).

In terms of relationship formation and stability, adult children of divorced parents often experience difficulties establishing trust and commitment in romantic partnerships. Attachment theory explains this by highlighting that early disruptions in the parent-child bond may foster insecure attachment patterns—such as anxious or avoidant styles—that

manifest in adulthood as fears of abandonment or reluctance to depend on others (Bowlby, 1988; Main, 1991). Such attachment insecurities may cause problems like jealousy, communication breakdowns, and emotional withdrawal in marital relationships, which negatively affect marital satisfaction (Simpson, 1990).

Moreover, intergenerational transmission of divorce is a well-documented phenomenon, where children of divorced parents have a higher probability of divorcing themselves (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). This increased risk may stem from learned behaviors witnessed during parents' divorce processes, including maladaptive conflict resolution, poor communication, and diminished problem-solving skills (Bandura, 1977). Observing parental conflicts and instability may lead adult children to develop pessimistic attitudes about marriage

Objectives

- To examine the correlation between parental divorce and marital satisfaction on the adult children.
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- To study the correlation between the marital status of the parents, marital happiness and feelings of well being on adult children.
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- To investigate whether attachment style mediates the connection between the divorce of their parents and the marital satisfaction of adult children.
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- To explore the difference between the genders on the impact of the divorce of their parents on marital satisfaction of the adult children..

Hypotheses

- There will also be a big difference in the marital satisfaction of adult children of divorced parents and those of parents who are married.
- Adult children product of divorce will record a decreased marital satisfaction as against adult children within intact families.
- The association between divorce and marital satisfaction in adult children will be greatly mediated by attachment style.
- There is going to be a sizeable gap between the net effects of parental divorce effects on the marital satisfaction in adult children along lines of gender.

Methodology

Research Design and Sampling Strategy

A quantitative correlational research approach serves as the foundation for this investigation. The statistical analysis of the association between two variables—in this case, parental divorce (an independent variable) and adult children's marital satisfaction (a dependent variable)—makes this approach suitable. Quantitative research is appropriate for examining behavioral outcomes related to marital quality and family history because it allows for objective measurement, statistical testing, and generalization to a larger sample (Creswell, 2014). It has carried out the study in a devised and procedural method. It started with identification and formulation of objectives and hypotheses broke down into the research problem. A timely step was taken to choose an appropriate instrument and to obtain a sample of South Punjab by employing a purposive method. Data recordings were based on the compilation of standardized questionnaires namely, the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale

and demographic form. Upon receipt of the responses, the data was coded and entered in the SPSS software where suitable statistical analysis was carried out on it. The selections of participants were made with the help of a purposive sampling method that enabled the identification of participants who fulfilled the specified research objectives that included specific inclusion criteria. This non-probability technique enabled the choices of the persons who had possessive knowledge regarding the research variables including the marital state of affairs and the divorce background of the parents. The sampling frame was made up of the married adults between ages of 25 and 40 years living in different districts of South-Punjab, the parents of whom had either divorced or had an intact marriage relation. The age group was selected because it included persons at steady periods of marriage and hence they are appropriate to be used to measure marital satisfaction. 40 participants participated in the trial with 20 in each group. 20 adult children of two-parents who are divorced 20 non-divorced families (intact family) adult children

The sample size was achieved by conducting purposive sampling and identifying participants who will be chosen depending on the inclusion criteria which were related to the objectives of the study. Individuals in 25-40 years age group included. As the main tool to evaluate the level of marital satisfaction

Variable	Category	N	%
Age	25–30	16	40.0%
	31–35	14	35.0%
	36–40	10	25.0%
Gender	Male	18	45.0%
	Female	22	55.0%
Parental Marital Status	Married Parents	20	50.0%
	Divorced Parents	20	50.0%
City	Bahawalpur	20	50.0%
	Multan	12	30.0%

Assessment Measures

- , the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS) that was developed by Olson et al. (1987) was applied. Also, to gather background demographics data about the participants including their age, gender, level of education, level of marital duration and the marital status of the parents, demographic information form was deployed. The survey had two sections: Demographic Section This had demographical questions such as participants age, gender, education level, duration in marriages, and whether either parent in the family is a single parent or not. ENRICH Marital Satisfaction

Scale: A standardized Likert-scale Marital satisfaction questionnaire that measures multiple dimensions of marital satisfaction. In the current research, quantitative, correlational research design was usable and the results were obtained in terms of primary data collected per a standardized questionnaire. The instrument employed was the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (Olson et al., 1987) that measures a number of aspects of marital satisfaction by married people. A purposive sampling of 100 married adults was done in the South Punjab.

- The questionnaire was based on two parts, the first part encompassed demographic data (age, gender, education, marital length and parents marital status) whereas the second contained items that were based on the Likert scale addressing marital satisfaction. The survey instrument was via Google forms and replies were received electronically.
- Once data had been collected, all answers would be summarized and be fed into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Version XX (insert your version). Ensued statistical methods:

Results

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis conducted to assess the impact of parental marital status (married vs. divorced) on the marital satisfaction of adult children. The analysis was performed using **SPSS software** and the **ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale**. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to the data, with a focus on examining the differences in marital satisfaction between two groups of adult children: those whose parents are **married** and those whose parents are **divorced**. **Descriptive Statistics** In total, **40 participants** were included in the analysis. These participants were divided into two groups based on their parents' marital status: **20 participants whose parents were married** and **20 participants whose parents were divorced**. The following table shows the demographic characteristics of the participants, including gender, age, and education level.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 40)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	18	45.0%
	Female	22	55.0%
Parental Marital Status	Married	20	50.0%
	Divorced	20	50.0%
Education Level	Bachelor's	16	40.0%
	Master's or Above	24	60.0%

Table 4.2: Marital Satisfaction Scores by Parental Marital Status

Parental Marital Status	N	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Married	20	126.45	14.80

Parental Marital Status N Mean Score Standard Deviation

Divorced	20	112.85	17.40
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The analysis in a nutshell determined that the adult children of the divorced parents had a far poorer marital satisfaction than their counterparts who belonged to the married families. The findings of independent sample t-test present evidence in support of the test hypothesis that marital satisfaction of adult children is determined by parent marriage.

Discussion

The question that was addressed by the present work was the extent to which parental divorce would affect marital satisfaction levels in the adult children, and the path that was followed included using a sample size of 40 married people (20 government and 20 intact families). The findings were statically significant enough to show that the adult children of divorced parents are more likely to be unsatisfied with their own marriage than their peers. This is consistent with the previous study (Amato, 2000; Cui & Fincham, 2010) proposing that parental divorce can experience long term effects on the love relationship of the children. It could relate to the theory of Attachment, where early relations are vital; separation due to divorce of parents could result in insecure attachment styles that later on will influence trust, intimacy, as well as emotional responsiveness to any form of relationships in adults. In the same way, the Social Learning Theory confirms that children can master how to act concerning relationships through watching their parents. Observation of (non) cooperation or disconnection in marital relations between the parents can shape the way adult children are likely to handle communication and conflict in their marriages.

Moreover, the findings confirm the Vulnerability-stress-adaptation (VSA) Model, which postulates that the members of divorced families can experience some vulnerabilities when they enter marital relationships also called fear of commitment or having impractical expectations that diminish the capacity to deal with marital stresses. All these are some of the factors that can make the marital satisfaction decrease. The results also lay stress on the need to pay attention to family background when getting involved in counseling marriage and premarital training sessions. Although the provided data reached the current hypothesis and theoretical framework, there is a necessity to interpret it in the context of the study limitations, such as the small sample size, purposive sampling method, and the use of self-reported data. However, this study contributes to the expanding body of knowledge on the effects of generations on marriage outcomes and the significance of intervention activities and mental counseling of young people in the family in cases of divorce.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the effect of parental divorce on the marital satisfaction of the offspring as adults. The results showed that there was highly significant difference in the marital satisfaction in people belonging to divorced family and intact ones with the offsprings of the divorced parents showing lesser marital satisfaction in their relationships. These findings are an indication that parental separation encountered at a tender age could have a prolonged impact on the manner in which the subjects see and conduct their own intimate associations. The appearance of such common patterns can be described in terms of such theoretical frameworks as Attachment Theory, Social Learning Theory, and the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model that underline the emotional, behavioral, and psychological implications of the breakdowns of family structure. Although the finding is in favor of the hypothesis of the study, the study is not without limitations, with the small

sample size and the use of purposive sampling that could limit the scope of generalizability of the research. Nonetheless, the study brings significant upheavals about the intergenerational reoccurrence in the realms of relations and engulfs the significance of stable family in the formation of healthy relations by adults. Future studies are advised to involve bigger and more diverse samples and take into account other different variables including the quality of parental relationship after divorce, remarriage, and the ways individuals cope with it individually. All in all, the study adds to the understanding of the effect that the family formation has on the adult marital relationships and underlines the necessity of specific support and counseling of people with the divorced parental background.

Limitations and Suggestions

There are some limitations to this research that have to be noted. Its sample size was also small and restricted to few regions hence compromising its generalizability. Purposive sampling and self-reports questionnaires could have created bias. Moreover, personality traits and family dynamics were deemed to be other influencing factors that had not been taken into consideration. In the future, samples will have to be more inclusive and diverse and examine more variables. The research should be conducted longitudinally and mixed-method to understand more and apply it further.

Implications

The results of the research are significant to mental health experts, guidance counselors, and educators. They emphasize the emotional consequences of the divorce of the parents on the adult children who got married at long-term. These findings can inform the process of designing specific counseling intervention and support programs. Moreover, it is possible to develop the awareness campaigns in order to make people in divorced families develop the healthier relationships and coping strategies..

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