

## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN MARRIAGE PRESSURE AND DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, STRESS ACROSS EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND GENDER

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### ABSTRACT

Marriage is a deeply ingrained expectation in Pakistani society, which frequently puts young adults under a lot of psychological pressure. This study looked at how young, single men and women in Pakistan felt about marriage pressure and how much stress, anxiety, and depression they experienced. Convenience sampling was used to gather data from 258 participants in a quantitative, correlational design. Standardized tools including Pressure to Marry (Guner, 2023) and DASS21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) were administered to carry a comparative analysis between marriage pressure and Depression, Anxiety and Stress across gender and employment status. The findings validated the psychological toll of societal expectations by showing that higher marriage pressure was significantly linked to higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. It's interesting to note that, in contrast to popular belief, male participants reported much higher levels of marital pressure than female participants, indicating changing gender roles and pressures in Pakistan. There were no notable variations between employed and unemployed participants. These results demonstrate the intricate relationship between gender, cultural norms, and mental health, underscoring the need for culturally competent mental health services and interventions that are adapted to the experiences of young adults negotiating social pressures associated with marriage in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Marriage Pressure, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Employment Status, Gender

### INTRODUCTION

Pressure to marry as unsolicited advice from others and inquiries into why one remains single. This “advice” often appears as encouragement, behavioural guidance to become more “desirable,” and insistent reminders to marry, often with a judgmental tone. Marriage pressure consists of three domains: perceived stigma and psychological pressure, social and environmental pressure, and marriage expectations (Lazar-Feigenbaum, 2014).

The primary reasons for marriage are emotional, religious, and sexual satisfaction (Neff & Morgan, 2014). Modern marriages, with their heightened expectations, require greater investment of time, energy, and resources than in the past. However, when partners can meet these expectations, marital satisfaction tends to improve (McNulty & Karney, 2004; Neff & Geers, 2013). According to a study, in Pakistan, there was found to be shift toward valuing love, compatibility, and shared goals, with younger generations prioritizing personal choice and

autonomy while still balancing traditional norms (Malik et al., 2020).

Societal norms in many cultures continue to prioritize marriage, especially for women. This pressure can lead women to enter marriages based on external expectations rather than personal desires (Albayrak & Günay, 2007). Societies often equate marriage with maturity and competence, stigmatizing unmarried individuals as incomplete or immature. (Tang, 2022). In another study it was found that unmarried Chinese women face intense social and familial scrutiny, which can undermine self-esteem and emotional well-being (Gui, 2022).

Previous studies have shown links between marriage pressure and mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and stress. A study highlighted that Middle Eastern women often experience anxiety and dissatisfaction when pressured to marry in accordance with family preferences. Such pressures can cause tension, reduce life satisfaction, and damage psychological well-being. (Eddir & Hadeel, 2022).

In many cultures, being single contradicts prevailing norms that idealize marriage hood. This bias, termed “singlism” promotes stereotypes and discrimination against single individuals (Byrne & Carr, 2005). Single individuals also face greater stress from social obligations, loneliness, and financial insecurity compared to married peers (Ta et al., 2017).

Hassan (2024) found that unmarried women in Pakistan under societal pressure are significantly more likely to report anxiety and depression, especially when they have limited financial resources and insecure employment status.

Young adult women who are unemployed between the ages of 25-30 in Islamabad and Rawalpindi reported greater degrees of loneliness than their employed counterparts. It is a form of social connection, structured day-to-day tasks, and identity that protects against loneliness and other psychological distress associated with it, they argue (Niazi et al., 2025).

In a study on social media engagement as a predictor of youth perception on marriage it was found that there was a significant influence of social media on youth perception of marriage. Social media is part of the factors included in ‘Marriage pressure’, and this study proves that

social media does have an effect on the way youth perceive marriage (Ajala et al., 2023).

Child marriages under the age of 18 are considered early marriages. The rate of early marriage is a prevalent problem for girls. Early marriages are generally the scope of forced marriages (Yağmur. S. K, 2023). A study performed in Pakistan on the subject of early marriages revealed that single and married young adult women were both not in favor of early marriage as they were alike under the risk of health problems. Married women have more mental disturbance and depressive symptoms (Ahmed et al., 2014).

According to a study, interpersonal relationships play a dual role in adolescent stress management. Adolescents tend to use trusted, familiar, approving people in their path to seeking help (Camara et al., 2013). Social support is also very effective barrier against depression, but the specific sources of support change as people age. Parents are especially important for children and teenagers, while adults and older adults often rely more on their spouses, followed by family and friends (Garipey, Honkaniemi & Quesnel-Valle, 2016).

According to a study on marital relationship perceived social support and mental health of Pakistani women. Research done on this paper directly related poor marital relationships among Pakistani women and anxiety and depression and hence. We have shown that support from friends and family reduces these effects (Qadir et al., 2013).

The current qualitative research shows that teenage girls make a decision to marry because of individual wants such as parenting and social expectations and not only because they are forced to do so. The findings suggest that economic insecurity, cultural norms and social comparisons exert considerable influence on young girls’ decision to engage in marriage and the decision results in emotional issues as well as depression. (Sarfo et al., 2024).

A study examined early marriage decision-making about when and whom to marry. It reveals that though young women to some extents are allowed to decide when to get married, but they experience a lot of social pressure to get married earlier to enable them to

complete their education and gain employment leading to restricted personal development causing them to develop mental illness. The study insists that even though young women make the choices, society puts pressure on young women which increases vulnerability to depressive symptoms (McDougal et al., 2018).

Another study by in Eastern Ethiopia examined, how social norms influence parents' intentions regarding the early marriage of adolescent girls. Young girls, therefore, suffer social pressure to marry early, end up losing educational opportunities, becoming socially isolated, and more vulnerable to mental health difficulties such as depression and anxiety (Abdullah et al., 2024). According to a research shed light on the point that creating marriage pressure enhances mental health problems when people are forced to conform to societal expectations against their true self (Zhu et al. 2022).

According to a 2024 study, psychosocial determinants for major depressive disorder (MDD) were identified among the young married women in India. Early marriage, lack of autonomy, and absence of social support were observed to be strong contributors to depression by those conducting the study (Dhara et al., 2024). Stress and anxiety increase with child marriage, especially in cases where young women do not have access to education and health services (Reisz et al., 2024).

Findings from the research demonstrate that both men and women experience considerable psychological pressures, such as depression, stress, and a sense of "unlived childhood." The study also reveals that marriage pressure is gendered: men are required to economically provide for their families, whereas women are usually subject to all reproductive and housework duties imposed upon them (Akçay et al., 2024).

Studies point out that Confucian culture has long had different expectations for sons and daughters. Daughters are viewed as kin-keepers with strong family relationships, whereas parents care more about the marriage of sons. Parents care more about sons' marriages because sons are supposed to carry on the family line and offer grandchildren, supporting patriarchal values in Chinese society (Zeng & Gu, 2016).

Research identified societal stereotypes linking married people with desirable qualities like maturity, happiness, and kindness and singles as immature, insecure, and lonely. Such pressure can result in ill-informed marital choices, which ultimately result in an increased risk of divorce. The research also indicated that 70–80% of divorced people get remarried, but these second marriages are at an even greater risk of failing in divorce (Kislev, 2019).

A study conducted on marriage pressures found that, yet-to-marry women face direct pressure from parents and indirect pressure from family, friends, and co-workers. These pressures sometimes lead to women feeling judged even though they perceive themselves as independent and free. They believe that they need to be careful in partner selection to avoid a failed marriage despite having waited for long time periods (Omoniyi & Adewusi, 2020).

Marriage pressure can lead to forced marriages, which may contribute to suicide even without a diagnosed psychiatric disorder. A study analyzed historical records, media, and eight cases- two ancient, six recent; where forced marriage appeared linked to suicide. (Pridmore & Walter, 2013).

Singlehood in Pakistan is deeply stigmatized, leading to significant psychological and social challenges for unmarried women (Rafiq & Fatima, 2023). A qualitative study was conducted with eight educated women aged 30–36 in Karachi and found that most remained single due to compatibility issues in matchmaking, a desire to protect personal freedom and career ambitions and negative past experiences, yet they faced intense family pressure, societal commentary, and limited support for independent living. Such findings align with previous research that documents the portrayal of unmarried women as "incomplete" or "unsuccessful" (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Byrne & Carr, 2005) and highlights how repeated marriage proposal rejections can harm women's self-esteem and body image (Iram & Muazzam, 2016).

Societal norms stigmatize single women as "leftover," subjecting them and their families to scrutiny and exclusion. It highlights the need to challenge "singlism" the discrimination and negative stereotypes against unmarried

individuals and to recognize singlehood as a valid social identity. The study emphasizes that entrenched cultural expectations act as chronic stressors, contributing to depression, anxiety, and stress, and reinforcing marriage pressure as a pervasive societal and familial issue in Pakistan (Bukhari and Riaz, 2023; Gui, 2022)

A study on the Masid tribal society in Pakistan found that patriarchal norms severely restrict women's autonomy in marriage, with parents holding primary authority in spouse selection. Surveying 200 participants from Peshawar and D.I. Khan, the research showed that cultural expectations compel women to conform to family decisions, limiting their marital rights. This lack of autonomy contributes to marriage pressure and related psychological distress, including stress, anxiety, and depression (Gul, Chaudhry & Shafique, 2018).

Research indicated that female gender, advanced age, and low income were correlated with increased levels of depression and anxiety, whereas higher education and urban residency functioned as protective factors. (Malik et al., 2025)

This study is grounded in two theoretical perspectives: Beck's Cognitive Triad and Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. According to Beck's cognitive theory of depression, individuals' thoughts and emotions strongly influence their behavior, with the cognitive triad highlighting three types of negative thinking about the self, the world, and the future (Beck et al., 1987). Thus, marriage pressure functions as a significant stressor that many women find difficult to manage, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and negative emotional outcomes.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the connection between stress, anxiety, and depression in young, single adults in Pakistan and the pressure from society to get

married. The study aims to shed more light on the ways in which social and economic factors interact with marital pressure to affect mental health by comparing gender and employment groups. The results are intended to support individual autonomy, lessen coercive marriage-related practices in Pakistani society, and guide culturally sensitive mental health interventions.

#### Method and Materials:

This study adopts a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between marriage pressure and depression, anxiety, stress among young unmarried males and females in Pakistan. Data was collected using two structured questionnaires using purposive sampling, focusing on aged 18-34. Statistical analysis was run using SPSS version 26. Independent T tests and Anova were run to find gender and employment-based differences among young adults. The Instruments used were 'Pressure toward Marriage scale and DASS 21.

With the approval of relevant authorities, university students and faculty were approached. After a brief study introduction, informed consent was obtained from each participant. Data was collected, and any questions or concerns raised, were addressed. Participants were encouraged to provide honest responses, and their cooperation was appreciated.

#### Results

To analyse the results, SPSS was used to conduct descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables. Furthermore, T test Anova test was run to find the comparison of Marriage Pressure across employment and Gender.

**Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables of Study (N = 258)**

Variable	f	%
Education		
Undergraduate	148	57.1
Graduate	82	31.7
Postgraduate	28	11.2

Employment			
Full-time student	130		50.2
Unemployed	48		18.9
Employed	80		30.9
Gender			
Male	96		37
Female	162		62

Above table shows frequency and percentage of demographic variables of the study which are education, employment, residence, and gender. 57.1% of participants were undergraduates, 31.7% were graduates, and 11.2% were postgraduates. In terms of employment, 50.2%

of participants were full-time students, 30.9% were employed, and 18.9% were unemployed. Regarding gender, 62% of participants were female and 37% were male.

**Table 2: Psychometric properties of the Study Major Variables/Scales (N=258)**

Variables	No. of items	Alpha reliability	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Range	
							Potential	Actual
Depression	7	0.882	13.65	11.12	0.62	-0.64	14-56	0-42
Anxiety	7	0.853	12.85	10.42	0.67	-0.59	14-56	0-38
Stress	7	0.846	14.74	10.18	0.45	-0.61	14-56	0-42
Marriage Pressure	29	0.876	79.95	17.12	0.22	-0.18	29-145	37-135

Above table shows descriptive statistics, alpha coefficients, and number of items for Depression, Anxiety, Stress, and Marriage Pressure. Alpha values of all measures are in the

acceptable range. For Depression it is 0.882, for Anxiety 0.853, for Stress 0.846, and for Marriage Pressure it is 0.876.

**Table 3: Independent sample t-test for Employment related differences (N=258)**

Variables	Unemployed (n=49)	Employed (n=80)	T	df	P	95%CI		Cohen's d
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)				LL	UL	
Marriage Pressure	84.08 (18.02)	85.25 (14.72)	0.38	86.47	0.70	-7.24	4.91	0.07
Depression	16.88 (11.41)	14.59 (10.23)	1.16	124	0.25	-1.60	6.17	0.21
Anxiety	13.96 (11.07)	14.08 (10.44)	-0.06	127	0.95	-3.95	3.72	0.01
Stress	15.67 (10.50)	16.32 (9.81)	-0.35	123	0.73	-4.30	3.02	5

Note: CI= Confidence Interval; LL= Lower Limit; UL= Upper Limit

Independent sample t-test was run to investigate employment related differences among males and females in Marriage Pressure, Depression, Anxiety and Stress (n=258) The results from the

independent sample t-test indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between unemployed and employed individuals

on any of the four psychological variables, as all  $p$ -values were greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ).

In terms of employment status, marriage pressure was slightly higher in employed individuals ( $M = 85.25$ ,  $SD = 14.72$ ) compared to unemployed individuals ( $M = 84.08$ ,  $SD = 18.02$ ), but this difference was not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). Similarly, unemployed individuals scored higher on depression ( $M = 16.88$ ,  $SD = 11.41$ ) than employed individuals

( $M = 14.59$ ,  $SD = 10.23$ ), yet this difference was also non-significant ( $p > 0.05$ ).

In contrast, employed individuals scored slightly higher on anxiety ( $M = 14.08$ ,  $SD = 10.44$ ) and stress ( $M = 16.32$ ,  $SD = 9.81$ ) compared to unemployed individuals ( $M = 13.96$ ,  $SD = 11.07$  for anxiety;  $M = 15.67$ ,  $SD = 10.50$  for stress). However, neither of these differences reached statistical significance ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 4: Independent sample t-test to investigate gender related differences (N=258)**

Variables	Males (n=97)	Females (n=162)	t	df	P	95%CI		Cohen's s d
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)				LL	UL	
Marriage Pressure	83.55 (15.56)	77.64 (17.69)	2.71	255	0.007	1.61	10.21	0.35
Depression	13.12 (10.04)	13.92 (11.82)	-0.55	252	0.58	-3.65	2.05	0.12
Anxiety	12.23 (9.89)	13.13 (10.71)	-0.68	256	0.50	-3.54	1.73	0.09
Stress	13.66 (9.71)	15.50 (10.43)	-1.39	252	0.17	-4.43	0.76	0.18

The results from the independent sample  $t$ -test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between males and females on marriage pressure, while no significant differences were found for depression, anxiety, or stress.

In terms of gender, marriage pressure was higher in males ( $M = 83.55$ ,  $SD = 15.56$ ) compared to females ( $M = 77.64$ ,  $SD = 17.69$ ), and this difference was statistically highly significant ( $p < 0.01$ ).

On the other hand, females scored slightly higher on depression ( $M = 13.92$ ,  $SD = 11.82$ )

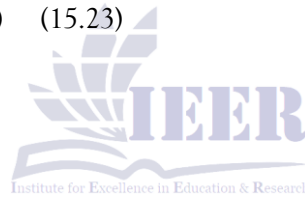
than males ( $M = 13.12$ ,  $SD = 10.04$ ), but this difference was not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). In contrast, females also reported higher mean scores on anxiety ( $M = 13.13$ ,  $SD = 10.71$ ) and stress ( $M = 15.50$ ,  $SD = 10.43$ ) compared to males ( $M = 12.23$ ,  $SD = 9.89$  for anxiety;  $M = 13.66$ ,  $SD = 9.71$  for stress). However, neither of these differences were significant ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 5: One Way ANOVA and Post Hoc test to investigate Differences on the basis of gender and employment status, in Marriage Pressure, Depression, Anxiety and Stress. (N=258)**

Variables	UM (n=14)	UF (n=35)	EM (n=40)	EF (n=40)	F	P	i>j	MD (i-j)	95%CI	
	M (S.D)	M (S.D)	M (S.D)	M (S.D)					LL	UL



Depression	18.14	16.35	15.64	13.54	0.79	0.50	UM > EM	2.50	-6.21	11.21
	(12.56)	(11.07)	(9.32)	(11.09)			UM > UF	1.79	-7.09	10.67
							UM > EF	4.60	-4.11	13.32
							EM < UF	-7.11	-7.27	5.85
							EM > EF	2.10	-4.23	8.44
							UF > EF	2.81	-3.74	9.38
Anxiety	15.71	13.25	14.35	13.80	0.19	0.90	UM > EM	1.36	-7.32	10.05
	(11.71)	(10.90)	(10.35)	(10.64)			UM > EF	1.91	-6.77	10.60
							UM > UF	2.45	-6.38	11.30
							EM > UF	1.09	-5.38	7.57
							EM > EF	0.55	-5.70	6.80
							UF < EF	-0.54	-7.02	5.93
Stress	15.86	15.60	16.16	16.47	0.05	0.99	UM < EM	-0.30	-8.58	7.98
	(12.19)	(9.94)	(9.26)	(10.46)			UM > UF	0.26	-8.12	8.63
							UM < EF	-0.62	-8.90	7.67
							EM > UF	0.56	-5.65	6.76
							EM < EF	-0.32	-6.39	5.76
							UF < EF	-0.87	-7.08	5.33
Marriage Pressure	87.07	82.89	89.02	81.48	1.80	0.15	UM < EM	-1.95	-14.77	10.86
	(16.41)	(18.72)	(13.33)	(15.23)			UM > UF	4.19	-8.86	17.23
							UM > EF	5.60	-7.21	18.41
							EM > UF	6.13	-3.41	15.69
							EM > EF	7.55	-1.68	16.78
							UF > EF	1.41	-8.14	10.96



Note: CI= Confidence Interval; LL= Lower Limit; UL= Upper Limit

ANOVA was used to investigate differences on the basis of gender and employment status in Marriage Pressure, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress. Results showed non-significant differences across the four groups for all psychological variables: Depression ( $F = 0.79, p > 0.05$ ), Anxiety ( $F = 0.19, p > 0.05$ ), Stress ( $F = 0.05, p > 0.05$ ), and Marriage Pressure ( $F = 1.80, p > 0.05$ ).

The post hoc comparison test further indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between unemployed and employed males, nor between unemployed and employed females, across any of the four psychological variables. Although unemployed males reported the highest mean levels of depression ( $M = 18.14, SD = 12.56$ ), followed by unemployed females ( $M = 16.35, SD = 11.07$ ), employed males ( $M = 15.64, SD = 9.32$ ), and employed females ( $M = 13.54, SD = 11.09$ ), these

differences were not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Similarly, mean differences across groups for anxiety (range:  $M = 13.25-15.71$ ), stress (range:  $M = 15.60-16.47$ ), and marriage pressure (range:  $M = 81.48-89.02$ ) were non significant in post hoc comparisons ( $p > 0.05$ ). Thus, the analysis suggests that gender and employment status did not produce meaningful differences in levels of marriage pressure, depression, anxiety, or stress in the sample.

### Discussion

The findings revealed that males reported significantly higher levels of marriage pressure than females, while no significant differences were observed based on employment status.

The substantial gender gap in marriage pressure found in this study is consistent with previous

research showing Pakistani men are subjected to social pressures.

Psychological distress, such as elevated stress and anxiety levels, can result from this pressure. Additionally, gender roles in Pakistan lead to differences in mental health between men and women, with men facing particular stressors associated with social expectations. (Najam et al., 2015).

This may reflect the shifting cultural landscape in Pakistan, where increased awareness and advocacy for women's empowerment have encouraged many young women to prioritize education and career advancement over early marriage. As gender roles continue to evolve, men may now be experiencing greater pressure to meet financial and societal expectations as prospective husbands, especially in households where women are deferring marriage for personal growth and autonomy. Moreover, the higher marriage pressure scores among males challenge the commonly held notion that only women bear the brunt of societal expectations around marriage. This could indicate an emerging trend where economic pressures, delayed career starts, and high expectations from in laws contribute to psychological strain in men.

Surprisingly, this study found no significant differences in stress, anxiety, or depression between males and females who were employed and those who were unemployed. This research suggests that factors other than work status might be more important in determining marriage pressure-related mental health outcomes.

All things considered, these results align with the body of research on the relationship between marriage-related social pressure and poor mental health outcomes. The findings advance our knowledge of the ways in which psychological well-being interacts with changing cultural dynamics, gender, and work status in relation to marriage expectations.

### Implications

The findings show that emotional health is severely impacted by pressure to get married, which emphasizes the need for culturally competent counselling services and mental health initiatives. It's interesting to note that

young men expressed more marital pressure than women, suggesting that support networks ought to take into account men's challenges with social expectations. The findings highlight the value of education and career opportunities and, while not definitive, imply that employment and financial security may help people manage the stress of marriage. Through public debates and awareness-raising initiatives, it is also necessary to question conventional wisdom regarding marriage. Furthermore, rather than promoting marriage as the sole path to happiness, the media ought to highlight a variety of life choices. Lastly, integrating assertiveness training and life skills into school curricula can help youth develop resilience to family and social pressure.

### Conclusion

Past researches have studied forced marriages in details, however the precursor to that is marriage pressure which is a much-understudied concept worldwide. The results obtained from this research also showed that significant marriage pressure exists in both genders. One of the surprising discoveries was that young males reported feeling more marriage pressure than women, which goes against what many might expect and shows how gender roles are changing in Pakistan today. The results from the comparative study showed that pressure to marry had no effect across employment status. While having a job didn't show a major difference in our numbers, it was found that being financially independent might help people cope better with these pressures.

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