

Emotional Competence and Marital Adjustment among Childless Women

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Abstract

Introduction: Childlessness is defined as the inability to achieve pregnancy after one year of unprotected sexual intercourse. It is linked not only with psychological problems like low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety but also affects a couple's marital adjustment. The aim of this study was to compare emotional competence and marital adjustment among childless women and women with children and to find out the correlation between emotional competence and marital adjustment of childless women and women with children.

Method: This was a descriptive and correlational study. Its sample consisted of two groups including childless women (n = 100) and women with children (n = 100) selected through purposive sampling technique from three districts (Ganderbal, Srinagar and Baramulla) of Kashmir Valley. Standardized tools were used for data collection. The collected data were analyzed through SPSS software.

Results: Findings revealed that women with children were higher on emotional competence than childless women. Similarly, women with children were much better in marital adjustment as compared to childless women. Results also indicated a positive correlation between emotional competence and marital adjustment.

Conclusion: Accordingly it can be stated that emotional competence can be considered effective in the better adjustment of women.

Keywords: Childless Women, Emotional Competence, Marital Adjustment

Introduction

Childlessness is defined as the inability to achieve pregnancy after one year of unprotected sexual intercourse. Women were having no live birth or no living children at the end of the reproductive life span [1]. This issue can result from different factors [2]. One can differentiate between involuntary childlessness (e.g. Infertility), intended childlessness (those who do not intend to have children), voluntary childlessness (the "childfree"), and temporary childlessness (related to circumstantial or delayed childbearing), which is neither voluntary nor involuntary [2]. Voluntary childlessness is referred to women of reproductive age who are fertile but have no intention to conceive. Women who have never had children desire to remain childless and without an underlying assumption that they are advantaged or disadvantaged with those with children [3]. Involuntary childlessness refers to those individuals who experience fertility problems [4]. Different factors contribute to voluntary and involuntary childlessness [5]. One of the major reasons for contemporary childlessness is the lack of a partner [6, 7].

Childlessness which is a stressful situation affects the marital adjustment of a married couple. Marital adjustment is satisfaction with the marital relationship and the spouse. Satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, consensus and affectional expression are all indicators of marital adjustment [8]. Many factors affect the marital adjustment of couples [9].

Childlessness is one of the factors that affect marital stability. Childlessness is linked with psychological problems like low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety, affecting a couple's marital adjustment [10].

Parenthood makes marriages stronger and strengthens the relationship of a couple [11]. Infertile women undergo many negative social consequences that include instability in marriage, stigmatization and exploitation [12]. Childless married women are affected in various communities [13]. It has been stated that childless couples are more likely to divorce than couples with children [14-18]. Domestic violence is also common in these couples [19]. Also disharmony of marriage was more evident among childless couples [20]. The poor quality relationship was associated with different family and community problems [21]. The absence of a role as a parent may harm marital relations [22, 23]. Many couples are confronted with childlessness worldwide, but little attention has been given to this problem [24]. Women are left feeling empty, defective, incomplete, undesirable and unworthy [25]. In both men and women, childlessness is associated with emotional responses such as depression, anxiety, guilt, social isolation, and decreased self-esteem [26]. Women experienced significantly more psychological distress than their partners [27]. In the community, childless men have less status than their peers with children and their views may not be considered or they may not be allowed to contribute to societal discussions [28].

Emotional competence is important in coping with these challenges. It is defined as the ability to perceive, regulate, express one's own emotions appropriately, and perceive others' emotions correctly [29-33]. It is an essential factor that can play a crucial role in coping with stressful situations. Those who have emotional competence can build life-long relationships. Emotional competence helps people develop tolerance and cope with life stressors. It facilitates recognizing one's motivations, feelings and desires, which is important in effective communication to a partner. Infertility affects the marital relationship of couples. Women with infertility face familial and societal pressures regarding childlessness. People having emotional competence can better handle their relationships. Emotional competence helps an individual in making his/her relationship productive and strong. Emotionally competent people are better able to resolve their conflicts as compared to others. This may be why they can deal with their marital issues intellectually than those with lower emotional competence. For couples, infertility is considered as a stressor or trauma in the journey of their new life. To have a successful marital life, couples should not allow negative thoughts and feelings about their spouse to overcome their positive thoughts [34]. Agreeable partners are more likely to give advice, help and support to their emotionally unstable partner, and such a person could tolerate or endure spousal abuse [35].

Previous studies indicate that childless women's lives are full of exciting challenges, stressful events, tensions, worries, and emotional disturbances. Which generate

psychological problems. The most crucial problems they face are economic hardships, psychological setbacks, denial of love and affection, apathy by relatives and friends, negative social attitude, negative personality growth, and social deviation. The condition of such women has become worse and is deteriorating day by day. Due to such kinds of situations, they suffer from various psychological and psychosomatic problems such as depression, anxiety, stress, drug abuse, suicide, cardiac arrest, heart disease, etc. To effectively function in day to day life, they have to develop personality traits by which they can overcome such challenges. Studies have revealed that emotional competence plays a vital role in adjustment and in coping with these challenges. Emotionally competent people are better able to resolve their conflicts as compared to others. Emotional competence helps people develop tolerance and cope with life stressors. Therefore, the aim of this study was to compare emotional competence and marital adjustment among childless women and women with children and to find out the correlation between emotional competence and marital adjustment of childless women and women with children.

Method

The descriptive and survey type method was employed as the present study is descriptive and correlational. The study sample consisted of two groups: childless women (N= 100) and women with children (N= 100) selected through purposive sampling technique from three districts (Ganderbal, Srinagar and Baramulla) of Kashmir Valley. Childless women were contacted from Clinics, gynecologists, hospitals etc. and women with children were contacted from various localities. The participants were made clear about the nature and purpose of the study and the voluntary basis of their participation. For the childless women, the inclusion criteria included being in the age range 30-40 years, The marital status being 10 years and above, Married women living with their husband, and participants were either under infertility treatment or had been under treatment before. For the women with children, the inclusion criteria included being in the age range of 30-40 years, having at least one child, and those married women who were living with their husband. Divorced women, widow's women, and women without a living child were not included in this study.

The tools used in this research are as follows:

Emotional Competence Scale: To measure the emotional competence in the present study, the Emotional Competence Scale, a revised scale developed by Dr H. C. Sharma and Dr R. L. Bharadwaj in 2013, was used. It has been developed for the age group of 13 to 44 years. This scale has 30 items to measure five emotional competencies, namely a) Adequate Depth of Feeling (ADF), b) Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions (AECE), c) Ability to Function with Emotions (AFE), d) Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions (ACPE) and e) Enhancement of Positive Emotions (EPE). The scale consists of six items in each competence and based on the lines of Likert, has five alternatives to each item. These five

alternatives follow a 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 from upper to lower end. The scale's reliability has been derived by employing two methods, viz., test-retest and the split-half method. The obtained coefficient of reliability found to be .74 (Test-Retest) and .76 (Split-half). The validity of this scale has been determined with factor A and C of the 16 personality factor questionnaire and found to be .64 and .69, respectively.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale: The adapted version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used in this research developed by Spanier in 1976. It has four subscales, namely 1) Dyadic Consensus, 2) Dyadic Satisfaction, 3) Affectional Expression, and 4) Dyadic Cohesion. There are 32 items in this scale. Among them, 13 measure consensus, 10 measure satisfaction, 5 measure cohesion and 4 measures affectional expression. The original reliability of the dyadic adjustment scale was .96, and the obtained test-retest reliability was .86. The original validity of the scale was .82, and after the revalidation on the Indian population, the obtained validity was .66.

The collected data was analyzed with the help of SPSS-20 by using descriptive statistics such as Mean and standard deviation. The t-test was also used to compare the mean score of emotional competence and marital adjustment among childless women and women with children. Between the variables, the relationship was examined by calculating correlation.

Results

The means and standard deviation scores of the two groups on emotional competence have been presented in Table 1. With the help of an independent sample t-test, the difference between the two groups was calculated. The table depicts a significant mean difference between the two groups on emotional competence. The results also indicated that mean scores of women with children were significantly higher on emotional competence, including five emotional competencies (Adequate Depth of Feeling, Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions, Ability to Function with Emotions, Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions and Enhancement of Positive Emotions).

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviation scores of the two groups on marital adjustment. With the help of an independent sample t-test, the difference between the two groups was calculated. The table depicts a significant mean difference between the two groups on marital adjustment. The results also indicated that mean scores of women with children were significantly higher on marital adjustment, including affectional expression, cohesion, consensus, and satisfaction.

Table 3 shows a correlation between emotional competence and its dimensions with marital adjustment. Accordingly, it appears that the correlation was extremely strong and was found statistically significant.

Table 1. Comparison of two Groups, Childless Women (n=100) and Women with Children (n= 100) on Emotional Competence and its Dimensions

Dimensions	Group	Mean	SD	t-value	p- value
Adequate Depth of Feeling (ADF)	Childless Women	18.20	3.34	17.24	.001
	Women with children	27.30	2.38		
Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions (AECE)	Childless Women	15.27	3.31	12.03	.001
	Women with children	28.34	4.70		
Ability to Function with Emotions (AFE)	Childless Women	16.45	4.68	19.50	.001
	Women with children	30.50	2.30		
Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions (ACPE)	Childless Women	19.22	2.43	14.54	.001
	Women with children	27.29	3.03		
Enhancement of Positive Emotions (EPE)	Childless Women	13.22	4.89	10.98	.001
	Women with children	27.29	2.35		
Emotional Competence	Childless Women	40.04	10.70	24.12	.001
	Women with children	80.78	6.34		

Table 2. Comparison of two Groups, Childless Women (n=100) and Women with Children (n= 100) on Marital Adjustment and its Dimensions

Dimensions	Group	Mean	SD	t-value	Level of significance
Affection Expression	Childless Women	8.02	3.34	10.12	.001
	Women with children	12.02	2.70		
Cohesion	Childless Women	9.34	3.12	14.28	.001
	Women with children	14.40	4.08		
Consensus	Childless Women	28.36	9.12	18.25	.001
	Women with children	45.12	5.30		
Satisfaction	Childless Women	17.19	6.67	12.77	.001
	Women with children	30.80	7.54		
Marital Adjustment	Childless Women	59.78	10.02	20.98	.001
	Women with children	100.41	14.89		

Table 3. Coefficient of Correlation between the Scores of Emotional Competence and Marital Adjustment.

Emotional Competence	Marital Adjustment
Adequate Depth of Feeling (ADF)	.48*
Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions (AECE)	.56*
Ability to Function with Emotions (AFE)	.66**
Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions (ACPE)	.52**
Enhancement of Positive Emotions (EPE)	.60**
Total Emotional Competence	.70**

**p<=.01 &*p<=.05

Discussion

The present study attempted to study emotional competence and marital adjustment among childless women and women with children. While analyzing the significant difference of emotional competence between two groups, results revealed that mean scores of women with children were significantly higher on emotional competence, including dimensions (adequate depth of feeling, adequate expression and control of emotions, ability to function with emotions, ability to cope with problem emotions and enhancement of positive emotions). Literature review did not come up with any studies in which childless women and women with children were compared on emotional competence. The results also revealed that women with children were higher in regards to emotional competence than childless women. The reason may be that women with children were handling the day to day stresses of life more effectively than childless women. Children are a great source of motivation for them. Parenthood has a substantial and enduring positive effect on life satisfaction [36]. Childless women reported a significantly lower level of life satisfaction and self-esteem compared to other mothers [37]. Hence, among women with children, emotional competence can be attributed to the sense of satisfaction with life due to the presence of children. The great source of satisfaction among women with children is motherhood which helps them develop emotional competence. On the other hand, childless women usually suffer from a sense of insecurity, hopelessness and generally develop a sense of dissatisfaction with life, making them emotionally vulnerable and generating negative thoughts. That is why they are found to be suffering from a lack of control over emotions. Due to childlessness, they undergo many negative emotions such as feelings of loss, anguish, anger, sorrow, sadness, lack of femininity, shame, and self-blame. These negative emotions affect the emotional competence in them. Hopelessness further affects the emotional competence of childless women. Lack of hope for a child is very important for a woman as it results in grief and lowers down the sense of self-control and self-confidence. Childless women develop feelings of incompetency, resulting in the development of a negative attitude towards themselves. Childless people doubting their sexual ability develop frustration and sometimes face mental disorders [38]. Therefore, childlessness tends to damage the emotional competence of women. Results also indicated that childless women had poor marital adjustment as compared to women with children.

This is in line with the previous findings where it was shown that childlessness was the main factor related to the condition of poor marital adjustment which creates greater deterioration in marital functioning [39]. Marital adjustment of childless women was very low as compared to fertile women [40]. Childless women had low autonomy, which could lead to marital separation [41]. Marital relationship is affected by childlessness [38]. Actually, infertile couples have reported poor marital adjustment and quality of life [42]. Females experience a greater amount of stress related to infertility, which is related to satisfaction, consensus, and affection [21]. It has been reported that infertility threatens harmony in the marital relationship and family life [43]. Infertility not only affects marital adjustment but the quality of life as well [44]. Uneducated infertile women were less psychosocially adjusted than educated infertile women [45].

Also, results revealed a positive correlation between emotional competence and marital adjustment. The literature review did not come up with any studies that explored the relationship between emotional competence and marital adjustment:

Conclusion

In the present research, the comparison of childless women and women with children was evaluated on emotional competence and marital adjustment. The findings showed that women with children were higher on emotional competence as compared to childless women. Similarly, women with children were much better in marital adjustment as compared to the childless women. Results also indicated a positive correlation between emotional competence and marital adjustment. This means the higher the emotional competence among childless women, the better the marital adjustment. Emotional competence can be considered effective in the better adjustment of women. To create solid evidence, additional data and better-planned studies are required. This study was conducted on childless women and women with children; childless males were not included in the study despite the fact that they also get affected due to childlessness. Due to the small sample size results of the present study cannot be truly generalized. The study considered only one moderator, namely, emotional competence of marital adjustment. Other moderators affect childless women. Therefore, it is suggested that a similar study be conducted on a larger sample in order to be able to generalize results.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval

All ethical principles were considered in this research, and the same has been approved by the Department of Teacher Training and Non-Formal Education (IASE), Faculty of Education, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi, India, under the declaration and guidelines of the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India. During the whole process, the confidentiality and privacy of the participants were guaranteed. To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, serial numbers rather than names were used to identify the participants. Participants were informed that they had the right to refuse participation at any time they wished.

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