

Marital Happiness among Newly Married Individuals in a Rural District in India

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Abstract

Marriage is almost universal in India and associated with many conventional individual, familial and socio-cultural factors. It remains an important component in the study of population and endures many important events in human life. Therefore, the present study was conducted to assess the level of happiness and its associated factors in a rural population in India. Primary data was collected from a cross-sectional survey of newly married (for at least one year but not more than five years) individuals (N=256, male: 136 and female: 120) in rural Varanasi district in Uttar Pradesh. Multistage PPS sampling was applied to select the study subjects. The measurement of marital happiness was based on standard and widely verified marital happiness scale. In addition, marital happiness as perceived by the individuals was also assessed. Level of happiness was assessed descriptively and ordered logistic regression was applied to examine the factors. Important significantly associated factors contributing to the lack of happiness were social support (positively), wealth (poor happier), marital duration (negatively), age (23-26 age-group happier), family type (nuclear family happier) and sex (men happier). Social-support may play a key role in the formulation of policies. In addition, the findings may provide useful clues to the social workers and counsellors associated with marital well-being.

Keywords: Marital happiness, newly married individual, social support, rural district, India.

I. Introduction

Marriage is often considered to be the most important event in one's life after birth. As an essential and divine social custom, it has usually been approved to achieve an adult's security and emotional needs (Kaplan & Benjamin, 2001). Marriage is an important status for an individual and permits a couple to live together in society. It is an important demographic component and an almost universal phenomenon in India (Das & Dey, 1998). A happy and prosperous married life is the ultimate goal for anyone who is either already married or is thinking about it (Murphy et al., 1997). It is said that marriages are made in heaven and celebrated on earth. Marriage is considered as a special bond shared between two souls by tying the wedding knot. This knot is a promise to be companions for a lifetime. It brings substantial stability in relationship between two individuals by complementing and supplementing each other (Seidman, 1997; Dev, 2010).

In the Indian subcontinent, marriage is attached with many significant meanings apart from the legal status for a couple to live together. One of the important implications of marriage in India is the coming closer of two different families of the couple (Fatima & Ajmal, 2012). From a demographic point of view, marriage is important because it regulates the reproductive behaviour of

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a couple (Islam, 2013). Although the concept of marriage is almost similar across the globe, the way of solemnizing it varies from place to place and culture to culture. Nowadays, many marriages fail, some form an uneasy compromise and others end in divorce or separation. The stability of marriage depends on many factors such as adjustment, communication, expectation, etc. Some well-known counselors like Clinebell (1970) were of the opinion that religious belief has a decisive role in minimizing the possibility of dissolution of marriage. It is essential for a pleasant life that they have to stay together.

Happiness is the basic key of happy and successful life (Dwoskin, 2011). Marital happiness, satisfaction and well-being are not synonymous, yet they are closely related and frequently treated interchangeably (Ney, 1974). Happiness and satisfaction go hand in hand. Satisfaction level decides one's level of happiness and, therefore, satisfied married life is considered a happy married life (Fatima & Ajmal, 2012). Due to this similarity, these terms have been considered in the review of prior research. Satisfaction with one's marriage tends to be a pivotal factor in overall happiness (Michael et al., 2000). Marital happiness is an essential element for successful family life and personal growth. The fulfillment and positive development will be possible only when the relationship between a couple is coherent and satisfactory (Abdulazeez, 2013).

Marital happiness indicates the sense of well-being or satisfaction he or she experiences in the marital relationship. It is a powerful indicator of marital quality (Fincham, 2009). Marital happiness has been found to correlate with household income, unrestricted attitudes, traditional marital attitudes, religiosity, and inter-dependence of familial and friendship networks (Kearns & Leonard, 2004). Happiness is the ultimate form of pleasure without which all other things are considered to be incomplete. It has been established that marital bliss is the most important factor in determining global happiness.

India's ranking in World Happiness Index has been continuously deteriorating over the years. For instance, India slipped from 111th rank in 2013 to 133rd rank in 2018 (Sachs et al., 2018). The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-3) that calls for "*ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages*" cannot be achieved without substantial improvement in happiness. If India's happiness ranking continues to deteriorate in the time to come, it would be an uphill task to achieve the SDG-3 (Griggs et al., 2013).

Marriage is a social institution significant for human life. Every young person cherishes an idea of a happy married life. Although marriage is a positive experience for man and woman alike, for some it is associated with dissolution, divorce or separation and even sense of hatred in India. The reasons for such experiences may be numerous and multi-factorial. In most cases, it may have happened because of very silly reasons rather than for any solid reason. Since marriage is an important social institution in India, several studies have been conducted in the past to understand its nature, patterns, and associated rituals and traditions (Chanda & Deb, 2013; Deshpande, 2010; Fiese et al., 2002; Sonawat, 2001). Though marital happiness has become an important issue among individuals and the marriage analyst, there has been a lack of formal research on this topic. Besides, the existing studies related to this topic are mostly from the western or developed countries and may not be of much relevance for India. Therefore, the present study makes an effort to examine marital happiness and its associated factors among newly married individuals in a selected rural area in Varanasi.

II. Materials and methods

Definitions

Marital happiness: It is a self-reported judgment made by the respondent that indicates the sense of wellbeing or happiness he or she experiences in marital relationship (Fincham, 2009).

Social support: It assesses three domains: *Family, Friends* and *Others* who are significant for newly married individuals (Zimet et al., 1988).

Newly married individuals: This term was used to refer to those who had been married for more than one year, but not more than five years (married for ≥ 1 years to < 5 years). They were the target population of the study.

Data sources and sampling methods

Primary data were collected to accomplish the objectives of this study. A cross-sectional survey using a multi-stage random sampling procedure was conducted to collect the information from newly married individuals. To increase the efficiency of the estimates, a multistage sampling design was followed to select the required number of respondents. Selection of respondents involved three stages of the sampling procedure. In the first stage, the community development block was selected, in the second stage villages were selected, and in the third stage newly married individuals were selected. The sample was selected by the method of proportional allocation from each of the selected villages. All the newly married individuals (married for ≥ 1 years and < 5 years) were listed. Further, eligible respondents were selected using systematic random sampling procedure (SRS). The data collection period was from 1st April 2017 to 31st July 2017.

Dependent variable

Marital happiness is the dependent variable in this study. It was measured with a 20-items scale-reflecting respondent's feeling towards various aspects of the marital relationship. A list of these 20-items used to assess the marital happiness has been given in *Appendix-1*. The scale was based on standard and widely used scales available in the literature (Zhang et al., 2013; Kamp et al., 2008; VanLaningham et al., 2001). A 5-point Likert scale ranging from one=very unhappy to five=very happy was used to classify their degree of happiness. The possible score ranged from 20 to 100. Higher the sum of score, higher the marital happiness. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the scale was 0.89. The value of Cronbach's alpha varies from 0 to 1. It is a measure of internal consistency of the set of items. When Cronbach's alpha is between 0.70 - 0.95, it shows good reliability of the index (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The principal component analysis was used to create a marital happiness index with three categories (low, medium and high) based on their marital relationship. In addition, perceived marital happiness was also assessed by asking "Taken all together, how would you say things are these days-would you say that you are very unhappy, unhappy, neutral, happy, very happy?".

Independent variables

A number of socio-economic and demographic characteristics such as age, sex, education, working status, type of family, religiosity, wealth status, marital duration, children under-5, media exposure and social support were considered for inclusion as independent variables in the analysis. Social support was measured using a 12-items scale reflecting people's feelings (*see Appendix-2*). These 12-items have been widely used to understand the support system of newly married individuals. The items used for this scale mainly assess three (family, friends, and significant others) domains of a newly married individual's life. Responses were classified on Likert scale ranging from one=strongly disagree to five=strongly agree. The possible score ranged from 12 to 60. Higher the sum of score, higher the level of social support (Zimet et al., 1988). Reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of this scale was 0.88. The value of Cronbach's Alpha shows good reliability of the index (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Statistical methods for data analysis

Descriptive statistics in general were used to analyze the profile of the respondents and specific descriptive statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, etc., were used to assess the marital

happiness by selected background characteristics. Since the dependent variable is in the ordinal form (high, medium, and low), an ordered logit model was used to examine the relationship with a set of independent variables. Besides, the principal component analysis technique was used to create the following indices: marital happiness index, social support index and wealth index. In this study, CSPro 6.1 was used for data entry and the SPSS-20 for data analysis (Long & Freese, 2006).

Ethical considerations

This study was based on primary data, therefore, an ethical clearance was obtained on 3rd March 2017 from the Students Research Ethics Committee (SREC) of the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai (Sr. No.15/1819) before undertaking it. Apart from this, prior consent was obtained from every individual before collecting information. A prior consent was acquired after presenting the utility of the study. The anonymity of the participant's identity was maintained.

III. Results

Background characteristics

About one-fourth of the respondents were aged 22 years or less (Table 1). Nearly half of them were aged 23-26 years and the remaining one fourth were 27 years or older. The proportion of male and female respondents was almost equal. Majority of the respondents were in SSC (Secondary School Certificate) and HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) level of education. About half of the respondents were working during marriage period. Majority of them lived in joint families. Three-fourths of them worshiped daily. About half of the respondents had at least one child. A higher proportion of them had media exposure. The respondents were almost evenly distributed among one, two, three and four years of marital duration and also among different categories (low, medium and high) of social support.

Marital happiness

As stated earlier, marital happiness was assessed in two ways; one, by asking the individuals their perceived happiness and two, by using marital happiness scale. Both the methods however, gave similar results. More than half of the newly married individuals perceived to be pretty happy and another one-third very happy with their present marital life. Thus, more than 80% of the individuals perceived to be happy. Based on scale also, the average happiness score among the individuals was more than 80 indicating the extent of happiness within an individual to be more than 80%.

Table 2 presents the results of bi-variate analysis of marital happiness with background characteristics. Marital happiness was observed higher in men than women. There was a positive relationship between the level of education and marital happiness. In general, respondents with a higher level of education (graduation and above) reported more marital happiness than others. Further, the respondents, who were working during marriage period, reported being happier than those not working then. Respondents who were living in nuclear families were happier than those belonging to joint families. Respondents, who were either in poor or rich economic status, were happier than those belonging to middle-class. Marital happiness was observed high in the initial years of marital duration (first and second years) than later years of marital duration. Respondents who had higher social support reported being happier than those with low and moderate social support.

Factors associated with marital happiness

The results of the ordered logistic regression analysis showed the adjusted effect of selected covariates on marital happiness (Table 3). The odds of marital happiness were higher among those aged between 23-26 years, those who were graduate and above level of education, those who were working, those who worship daily, those who belong to rich wealth status, those who had no children, and those who had no media exposure. However, these associations were not statistically significant.

Statistically significant association of marital happiness was found with the respondent's sex, type of family, marital duration and social support. Marital happiness was lower among females than males (OR=0.49, 95% CI=0.32-0.74). It was also lower among those who were living in a joint family. Those who were in the first year of marital duration have higher marital happiness than in other years of marital duration. Marital happiness was seven times higher among those who had high social support as comparison with those who had low social support (OR=6.58, 95% CI=3.36-12.85).

Table 1: Number (n) and proportion (%) of newly married individuals by selected background characteristics in rural Varanasi, 2017

| Background characteristics | n | % |
|--|------------|--------------|
| Age (in years) | | |
| ≤ 22 | 70 | 27.3 |
| 23-26 | 124 | 48.4 |
| ≥ 27 | 62 | 24.2 |
| Sex | | |
| Male | 136 | 53.1 |
| Female | 120 | 46.9 |
| Education level | | |
| Secondary & Below | 96 | 37.5 |
| SSC & HSC | 103 | 40.2 |
| Graduation & Above | 57 | 22.3 |
| Working status | | |
| Respondent itself | 116 | 45.3 |
| Other family members | 140 | 54.7 |
| Family type | | |
| Nuclear family | 55 | 21.5 |
| Joint family | 201 | 78.5 |
| Religiosity | | |
| No prayer | 55 | 21.5 |
| Pray sometimes | 100 | 39.1 |
| Pray daily | 101 | 39.5 |
| Wealth status | | |
| Poor | 85 | 33.2 |
| Medium | 86 | 33.6 |
| Rich | 85 | 33.2 |
| Marital duration (in completed years) | | |
| One | 58 | 22.7 |
| Two | 74 | 28.9 |
| Three | 49 | 19.1 |
| Four | 75 | 29.3 |
| Children under-5 | | |
| No | 131 | 51.2 |
| Yes | 125 | 48.8 |
| Media exposure | | |
| No exposure | 42 | 16.4 |
| Any exposure | 214 | 83.6 |
| Social support | | |
| Low | 86 | 33.6 |
| Medium | 87 | 34.0 |
| High | 83 | 32.4 |
| Total | 256 | 100.0 |

Note: SSC-Secondary School Certificate, HSC-Higher Secondary Certificate.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation (SD) of marital happiness among newly married individuals in rural Varanasi, 2017

| Background characteristics | Mean | SD | N |
|--|-------------|-----------|----------|
| Age (in years) | | | |
| ≤ 22 | 78.0 | 10.1 | 70 |
| 23-26 | 79.5 | 10.6 | 124 |
| ≥ 27 | 77.5 | 11.1 | 62 |
| Sex | | | |
| Male | 80.1 | 11.8 | 136 |
| Female | 78.7 | 9.5 | 120 |
| Education level | | | |
| Secondary & below | 78.6 | 10.8 | 96 |
| SSC & HSC | 79.2 | 10.6 | 103 |
| Graduation & above | 81.7 | 10.9 | 57 |
| Working status | | | |
| Respondent itself | 80.7 | 11.9 | 116 |
| Other family members | 78.5 | 9.7 | 140 |
| Family type | | | |
| Nuclear family | 81.2 | 11.0 | 55 |
| Joint family | 79.1 | 10.7 | 201 |
| Religiosity | | | |
| No prayer | 77.2 | 11.3 | 55 |
| Pray sometimes | 80.3 | 11.1 | 100 |
| Pray daily | 80.0 | 10.0 | 101 |
| Wealth status | | | |
| Poor | 80.5 | 9.8 | 85 |
| Medium | 77.9 | 10.7 | 86 |
| Rich | 80.1 | 11.6 | 85 |
| Marital duration (in completed years) | | | |
| One | 83.0 | 9.3 | 58 |
| Two | 80.2 | 9.5 | 74 |
| Three | 77.0 | 11.1 | 49 |
| Four | 77.8 | 12.1 | 75 |
| Children under-5 | | | |
| No | 79.7 | 9.4 | 131 |
| Yes | 79.3 | 12.2 | 125 |
| Media exposure | | | |
| No exposure | 80.2 | 8.5 | 42 |
| Any exposure | 79.4 | 11.2 | 214 |
| Social support | | | |
| Low | 74.1 | 10.9 | 86 |
| Medium | 79.2 | 8.6 | 87 |
| High | 85.5 | 9.6 | 83 |

Note: SSC-Secondary School Certificate, HSC-Higher Secondary Certificate.

IV. Discussion

Marriage is one of the most important events in one's life. As the most essential and divine social custom, it has usually been approved to achieve an adult's security and emotional needs. Uttar Pradesh is one of the major states where problems of job opportunity are more because of which people in their young age move towards economic hubs like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore, etc., for earning their livelihood. Leaving wife at birth place and moving out for job seeking is one of the most significant challenges to maintain the happy life. Thus, the present study attempted to assess

Table 3: Results of ordinal logistic regression of marital happiness among newly married individuals by selected background characteristics in Varanasi, 2017

| Background characteristics | Odds Ratio | 95% C.I. |
|--|------------|--------------|
| Age (in years) | | |
| ≤ 22 | 1.00 | |
| 23-26 | 1.42 | 0.75 - 2.69 |
| ≥ 27 | 1.09 | 0.47 - 2.52 |
| Sex | | |
| Male | 1.00 | |
| Female | 0.49*** | 0.32 - 0.74 |
| Education level | | |
| Secondary & below | 1.00 | |
| SSC & HSC | 1.32 | 0.74 - 2.37 |
| Graduation & above | 1.37 | 0.62 - 2.74 |
| Working status | | |
| Respondent itself | 1.00 | |
| Other family members | 0.59 | 0.30 - 1.16 |
| Family type | | |
| Nuclear family | 1.00 | |
| Joint family | 0.60*** | 0.11-0.85 |
| Religiosity | | |
| No prayer | 1.00 | |
| Pray sometimes | 1.53 | 0.78 - 3.01 |
| Pray daily | 1.77 | 0.89 - 3.52 |
| Wealth status | | |
| Poor | 1.00 | |
| Middle | 0.78 | 0.41 - 1.39 |
| Rich | 0.88 | 0.44 - 1.68 |
| Marital duration (in completed years) | | |
| One | 1.00 | |
| Two | 0.78 | 0.37 - 1.59 |
| Three | 0.32*** | 0.13 - 0.72 |
| Four | 0.42** | 0.18 - 0.94 |
| Children under-5 | | |
| No | 1.00 | |
| Yes | 1.37 | 0.80 - 2.32 |
| Media exposure | | |
| No exposure | 1.00 | |
| Any exposure | 0.72 | 0.37 - 1.38 |
| Social support | | |
| Low | 1.00 | |
| Medium | 1.92** | 1.07 - 3.44 |
| High | 6.58*** | 3.36 - 12.85 |

= p<0.05, *=p<0.001, SSC-Secondary School Certificate, HSC-Higher Secondary Certificate.

the status of marital happiness with its associated factors. For this, the study provides a portrayal of marital happiness of newly married individuals through a cross-sectional study.

Attention may be drawn from this study to the fact that respondents belonging to the 23-26 years age group are happier than their counterparts in other age groups. These findings are consistent with the research by Fincham and Linfield (1997), who found that younger adults were more satisfied with their marriage than older adults. At younger age married individuals may place greater emphasis on positive marital processes for their better marital happiness because they have a tendency to perceive time as unlimited and thus may be more motivated to highlight the positive aspects of the marital relationship. Marital happiness was observed higher in men than women. This is in confirmation of findings of earlier studies. A study by Radloff (1975) found that men benefit more than women from marriage. Another study by Glenn and Weaver (1988) also indicated that married men are happier than married women.

Our study further revealed that education had a positive association with marital happiness among newly married individuals. A study by Vanassche et al., (2013), also showed a significant positive effect of education on marital happiness. Another study by Barongo et al., (2014) too had similar findings. They found that respondents with higher education had a higher level of marital happiness. The respondents who were working during marriage period reported being happier than others. A study by Johnson et al., (1988) shows that working respondents were happier than the other working family member. It further indicated that the respondents from nuclear families had more marital happiness than those from the joint families. Another study conducted by Johnson et al., (1988) also supported this finding. Further, religiosity was another important factor affecting marital happiness. In this study, the frequency of prayers by the respondent was taken as a proxy of religiosity. The results indicate that those who prayed sometimes or daily reported to be happier than their counterparts who did not do so.

The study further reveals that marital happiness was higher among respondents with poor economic wealth status, may be because poor people have high social support as compared with rich people. A study by Vanassche et al., (2013), found contradictory results in the case of wealth status. The financial situation of the respondents affects the happiness of the spouses. The spouses from the lowest and middle quartile reported to be less happy than their counterparts belonging to the higher wealth quartile. These results may be because this study was conducted in developed counties where other associated indicators are better than in developing countries which have an intense impact. Various studies have also found that income is positively related to marital and family life satisfaction (Schramm & Harris, 2011; Spanier & Lewis, 1980).

The duration of marriage was another important determinant of marital happiness. Happiness was high among the respondents within the first year of marital duration, followed by two and more years of marital duration and the findings were statistically significant at 5% level. A study by Van Laningham et al., (2001) also found a curvilinear association between marital duration and marital happiness. They concluded that the overall association between marital happiness and marital duration was strong. The respondents who had children were happier as compared with those who did not have any child. They further concluded that the presence of children in the household was significantly related to marital happiness. Social support of the respondents had a positive and highly significant association with marital happiness. Moreover, the respondents, who had higher social support, reported higher happiness. Social support is one of the significant factors in marital relationships (Richter, 2014; Acitelli, 1996). Various studies found positive associations between spousal support and marital satisfaction (Julien & Markman, 1991; Acitelli, 1996; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998).

V. Conclusion

This study was conducted to find out the factors necessary for a happy married life. It reveals that family type, marital duration, sex of the respondents and social support were the strong predictors for marital happiness. They were statistically significant with respect to marital happiness. However, the rest of the factors (age, education, working status during marriage period, religiosity, wealth index, children under five and media exposure) had a weak relationship with marital happiness. All the factors mentioned above are necessary for a happy marital life and their absence can cause serious problems. But how a person rates these factors and how much importance he/she gives to each of them varies from person to person, depending upon the culture of the person. For example, in most of the eastern countries good relations with in-laws are considered important in a happy married life, but in western countries they may not be considered that important. Therefore, the importance of these factors varies from individual to individual and from culture to culture.

Implications of the study

The findings of the study focused on one of the important events of the human life (such as marriage), which may attract the attention of social workers, counselors and people who are

interested in the general welfare of human beings. The study brings out new findings based on the marital happiness of newly married individuals. It also suggests the need for a scheme to give aid to newly married individuals. It further indicates the need for marital counseling. In counseling, these people may be made aware of the factors that may help or hamper their marital life.

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Appendix 1: Marital happiness items

These 20-items were asked from the respondents to report their degree of happiness with:

1. The amount of understanding received.
2. The amount of love and affection received.
3. Extent to which the respondent and spouse agreed about things.
4. Sexual relationship.
5. The way the spouse got along with the children (if any).
6. The spouse as a bread-winner.
7. The spouse as someone who took care of things around home.
8. The spouse as someone to do things with.
9. The spouse's faithfulness.
10. The spouse financial situation.
11. Their happiness with their home.
12. How happy the marriage was.
13. How the marriage was compared to others.
14. If the marriage was better or worse than some previous years.
15. How strong feelings of love for the spouse were in the past year.
16. The spouse communication.
17. The spouse social activities.
18. The spouse occupation.
19. The spouse independence.
20. Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage? Would you say that your marriage is very unhappy, unhappy, neutral, happy, very happy?

Appendix 2: Social support items

These 12 items were asked from the respondents to report their feelings about different dimensions of social support:

1. There is a special person who is around when I am in need.
2. There is special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.
3. Your family really tries to help you.
4. Get emotional help and support from family in need.
5. Have a special person who is a real source of comfort to you.
6. Your friends really try to help you.
7. You can count on your friends when things go wrong.
8. You can talk about your problems with your family.
9. You have friends with whom you can share your joys and sorrows.
10. There is a special person in your life who cares about your feelings.
11. Your family is willing to help you in decisions making.
12. You can talk about your problems with your friends.