

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARITAL SATISFACTION WITH BODY IMAGE  
AND COMMUNICATION AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN PAKISTAN**

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**ABSTRACT**

The current research aimed to explore the relationship between marital satisfaction, body image and the role of communication in married individuals. It was hypothesized that there will be a relationship between marital satisfaction and body image, there will be a relationship between marital satisfaction and communication and that body image will predict marital satisfaction. The present research is a quantitative approach based on correlational research design. The sample was a total of 200 participants, equal number of male and female, between the ages of 18-40 years who had been married for a minimum of 2 months and maximum of 7 years. They were recruited using snowball sampling technique. The research variables were measured using Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS), Body-Image Questionnaire (BIQ) and Self-Perceived Communication in the Couple Relationship (SCCR). The results were analyzed using SPSS, for correlation, simple linear regression and independent samples t-test. The results reflected a significant positive correlation between marital

satisfaction and body image at  $r=0.272^*$ . Moreover, positive communication had a negative relationship with marital satisfaction, while negative communication had a positive relationship with marital satisfaction at  $r=-0.444^{**}$  and  $r=0.194^*$  respectively. Lastly, marital satisfaction was established to be significantly and positively predicted by body image at  $r=0.272$ .

Keywords: Marital satisfaction, body image, communication, married individuals, Pakistan.

## INTRODUCTION

Marital satisfaction is a relatively novel term that may sound simplistic but is highly dynamic, subjective and individualistic in nature. Studies that were conducted in early times emphasized marital adjustment rather than marital satisfaction. Marital adjustment is a process, whose success depends on the personal anxiety, interpersonal tensions and personal anxiety, dyadic cohesion, marital satisfaction, level of troublesome marital differences and consensus on the significance of marital functioning (Ayub et al., 2023). It is noteworthy that the concept of marital satisfaction emerged later, with one of the initial theories proposed in 2011. In line with the dynamic goal theory of marital satisfaction, marital goals can be classified into three distinct categories: goals related to personal growth, goals pertaining to practical outcomes, and goals centered on companionship (Li et al, 2011).

The extensive literature on marital satisfaction demonstrates its increasing recognition as an important aspect of spouse contentment. A research investigating the correlation between marital satisfaction and age difference between spouses found that individuals married to younger partners reported higher satisfaction levels in the first 6-10 years, but satisfaction steadily declined thereafter, unlike couples with minimal or no age difference (Lee & McKinnish, 2018).

A research conducted in Kerala, India, indicated that socioeconomic status was positively correlated with marital satisfaction, implying that couples from lower economic backgrounds reported lower levels of satisfaction in their marital relationship (Kevin & Risla, 2020). In addition, a group of researchers employed a similar approach by observing the relationship of socioeconomic status, sexual self-efficacy and dyspareunia with marital satisfaction. The results favored their hypothesis and indicated that an improvement in sexual self-efficacy may lead to an improvement in marital satisfaction (Taghani, Ashrafizaveh et al, 2019).

Moreover, a different perspective was pursued which involved observing the influence of religiosity and levels of spirituality on an individual's level of satisfaction within their marriage. The research aimed to unravel how spirituality and commitment and practice towards religion can

influence satisfaction with their marriages by focusing on Muslim couples as a sample. The results showed that both religious commitment and practice played a significant role in increasing marital satisfaction (Aman et al., 2019). One's religiosity and spirituality levels can also be determined by the culture that drives their lives. One such research compiled studies in this field and summarized its major conclusions before focusing on the comparison of factors that predict marital satisfaction in individualistic and collectivist societies. The existing literature on marital satisfaction was compared between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, highlighting both shared and distinct factors influencing marital satisfaction. It was discovered that marital satisfaction predictions are common to both individualistic and collectivist societies, despite some contradicting findings that make it difficult to draw firm conclusions (Kazim & Rafique, 2021). Furthermore, research attempted to discover the impacts of sexting behaviour on marital satisfaction. The findings indicated that engaging in sexting behavior does not typically lead to an increase in marital satisfaction. It was suggested that 91% of respondents reported sending or receiving sext text messages, according to the findings. With the exception of younger women, who reported high marital satisfaction despite their negative views of sexting, this research also found that married people had a more negative view of sexting than people in other relationship statuses. Conclusively, sexting did not appear to improve marital satisfaction (Jeanfreau et al, 2018).

Nonetheless, factors influencing satisfaction in marital relations are not confined to external determinants. Individual differences and characteristics are just as important in altering marital satisfaction. For example, certain personality traits can significantly influence this aspect. A research investigating the predictive role of self-compassion and forgiveness in marital satisfaction among young couples proposed that self-compassion was linked to marital satisfaction in women, according to Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analyses, whereas in males, forgiveness was linked to marital satisfaction. Forgiveness and self-compassion could both, to varying degrees, predict marital satisfaction in the overall group. These factors served as marital satisfaction predictors in young couples (Fahimdanesh et al, 2020). Following a similar route, another research also aimed to discover the correlation between the existence of different personality traits and their influence on marital satisfaction. Results revealed that couples inclined towards the higher end of neuroticism reported being less maritally-satisfied while those on the higher end of conscientiousness reported being more maritally-satisfied (Sayehmiri et al, 2020). Moreover, studies have shown that marital satisfaction has proven to be an important indicator of both individual and relationship well-being. However, limited empirical research has been conducted to explore factors beyond a Western context. To bridge this gap, a research utilized data from 7178 individuals representing 33 different countries, shedding light on the diverse relationships between sex, age, religion, economic position,

education, and cultural values. The findings indicated that individual characteristics exert a more significant influence on marital satisfaction (Dobrowolska et al., 2020).

In a comparable context, the perception of body image has a notable effect on the degree of marital satisfaction among couples. This applies to both husbands and wives, as well as the overall satisfaction experienced by the couple as a unit was found to be weakly but significantly correlated with the satisfaction of the husbands' bodies. However, there was no statistically significant link between wives' satisfaction with their bodies and marital satisfaction (Ellis-Ordway, 2016). Another research conducted by (Azra et al, 2016) reported that married adults demonstrated a significant correlation between body image and marital satisfaction during the post-test and follow-up periods, covariance analysis showed a significant difference in marital satisfaction and body image levels for both experimental and control groups. After two months, the effects of cognitive hypnosis therapy continued to improve women's perceptions of their bodies and their marital satisfaction (Janbaz Fereydooni et al., 2021). The body of literature suggests a strong relationship between a spouse's body image and their subsequent satisfaction with their marital relation.

Body image is a concept that is complex and encompasses many different aspects, characteristics and dimensions. The term was first coined and used by the neurologist and psychiatrist, Paul Schilder in 1950. He defined this novel word as the way in which an individual forms a pictorial depiction of their body and how they perceive its physical appearance too (Posluszny et al., 2021).

Once the term gradually weaved its way around the world of researchers, they began to experiment with and explore this concept and attempted to propose improved definitions for it. A few years after Schilder's theory, Fisher (1990) broadened its scope by including the way a person perceives their body, level of attractiveness, body size distortion and boundaries and how accurate their bodily sensations are. In the same year, Pruzinsky and Cash stated that it is simply how an individual perceives, thinks and feels about their body (Thompson et al., 2019). More than a decade later, the same pair of authors modified their definition by including one's attitude - along with the psychological and physiological aspects - regarding their body, its size and shape and how they internally appraise their physical features (Soulliard et al., 2019). Following a similar route, it was added how Body image can be defined as an individual's personal and subjective perception of their physical appearance, encompassing the accompanying emotions and thoughts that arise from this perception (Grogan, 2016). Lastly, a more comprehensive explanation was then proposed which broadened the concept of body image by covering one's perception on their sexuality, state of health and skills (Biordi & Galon, 2011).

According to the available literature on this concept, one prominent research highlighted that body image has a multidimensional nature which comprises perceptual, affective, attitudinal, behavioral and cognitive traits. Perceptual dimension denotes how a person accurately estimates their body size in relation to the actual size; affective dimension involves feelings about one's body; attitudinal dimension includes a biased and subjective dissatisfaction with the body; behavioral dimension includes actions which compensate for an excess or lacking such as dieting and lastly, cognitive dimension is the belief one has about their body and how much they invest in their appearance (Vered & Walter, 2015).

Furthermore, 8researchers shifted from tentatively exploring the term to unveiling the factors influencing body image, particularly gender. It seemed to exist differently among different genders. Research highlighted that females, especially those in their adolescence, seemed to harbour a relatively more negative body image and employ avoidance coping strategies less than their male counterparts (Avci & Akliman, 2018). Similarly, another research concluded that women exhibit a heightened sense of body image dissatisfaction as they progress through different stages of life, while men's preoccupation with their physical appearance tends to wane over time (Quitkat et al., 2019). Furthermore, research findings consistently indicate that women tend to express more negative body image perceptions and experience higher levels of dissatisfaction with their physical attributes in comparison to men (Fischetti et al., 2020). These findings have been corroborated by subsequent studies, which consistently support the notion that women experience higher levels of body image distress (Milton et al., 2021). Interestingly, these patterns appear to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, as evidenced by recent research conducted in Pakistan, which revealed that men enjoy a comparative advantage due to the lower expectations imposed upon them in terms of physical appearance (Zubair & Ali, 2021). Latest research has also demonstrated a correlation between women's elevated dissatisfaction with their body image and their inclination towards desiring thinness, as well as engaging in body comparisons against societal ideals (Robert-McComb & Massey-Stokes, 2013). However, these researches do not denote that men never face issues with their body image. One such research's results suggested that men commonly harbor pessimistic attitudes about their physical appearance and their body (Griffiths et al., 2016).

The significance of cultivating a good body image cannot be overstated, as it has profound effects on various aspects of an individual's life, such as their physical, psychological, and interpersonal functioning of life. A research conducted on females revealed a prevailing preference for a thin body image style. Interestingly, those who did not have distorted perceptions of their body image were found to have healthier nutritional intakes. This discovery underscores the significant link between the perception of body image and overall well-being (Alipour et al., 2015). Furthermore,

Research has demonstrated that the way individuals perceive their body image has an impact on their sexual health. A research established a positive correlation between sexual function and body image, indicating that women with a positive body image had higher levels of sexual health and value compared to those with a negative body image (Afshari et al., 2016). This suggests that one's perception of their body significantly influences their sexual well-being. Additionally, the impact of body image disturbances is particularly evident in individuals who have undergone medical treatments. For example, breast cancer survivors who experienced body image disturbances post-treatment faced difficulties in sexual functioning (Boquiren et al., 2015). Similarly, medical issues and treatments, such as those experienced during pregnancy, can lead to changes in the body and subsequently affect an individual's perception of their body, potentially resulting in adverse psychological effects. Research has shown that pregnant individuals who have a negative body image are more prone to experiencing heightened levels of sadness, anxiety, and antenatal depression, especially if they have a prior history of mood disorders (Roomruangwong et al., 2017). Likewise, patients with head and neck cancer demonstrated a significant correlation between body image and symptoms of depression not only at the end of treatment but also at six- and twelve-weeks post-treatment (Rhoten et al., 2014). This highlights the overwhelming impact of body image concerns on psychological well-being during the recovery process.

Hence, the extensive literature suggests that marital satisfaction is a concept that is multifaceted and shaped by many internal and external forces. Moving forward, apart from one's body image, another internal factor, i.e., the communication quality and skills existing between couples in a married relationship can also impact the satisfaction they experience from their marriage. A research conducted in Kerala aimed to explore how various communication styles can impact marital satisfaction. The results supported their hypothesis by proving that the quality of communication among spouses is a strong determinant of satisfaction in their marital relations (Jafari et al., 2021).

Communication is a simplistic term that exists in many different forms. It is a fundamental process that plays a vital role in human interaction and the exchange of information. Defined in the true form, it is an organism's discriminatory response to a stimulus. The definition refers to the idea that when an organism has impinged with an environmental disturbance (the stimulus) and they do something in response to it (discriminatory response), communication occurs. Hence, it is noteworthy that if no response is given to an environmental disturbance, it can be concluded that communication has not occurred (Urakami, 2023).

The concept of communication holds immense significance in theories of relationship deterioration, as they are believed to retain their resilience when partners exhibit sensitivity in their



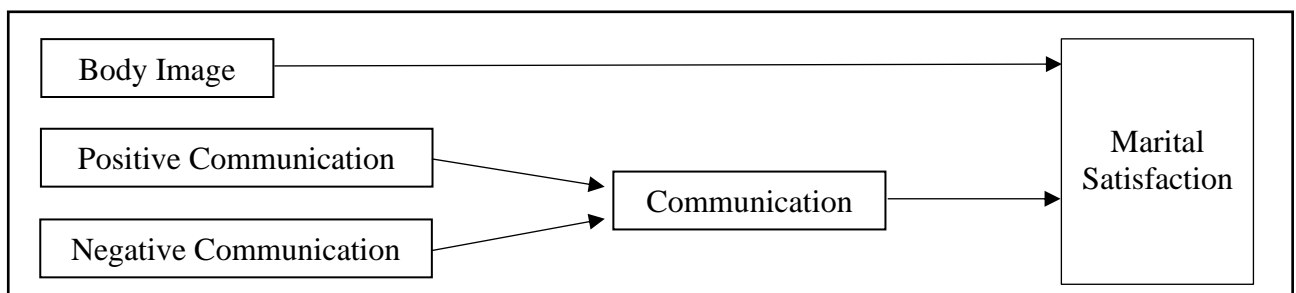
interactions and responses towards one another (Rimé et al., 2020). Initially, interpersonal communication was defined as the exchange of verbal/non-verbal communication between two people without the aspect of what relation they possess (Tamul & Hotter, 2019). Subsequently, through further investigation, researchers concluded that interpersonal communication varies depending on the nature of the relationship individuals maintain. Hence, the defining attributes of an interpersonal relationship were classified as uniqueness, irreplaceability, and a requirement of understanding their partner's personality (McEwan, 2021). From this theoretical perspective, a central concept emerged known as relational communication, which falls within the realm of interpersonal communication and focuses on the expression and interpretation of communication within close relationships. Relational communication encompasses a wide range of aspects and components - varying from essential relational messages to mundane everyday interactivity (Matos & Haze, 2019).

After the establishment of the different concepts associated with this term, another important perspective includes exploring the several determinants which impact communication. In one such research, a pattern was observed regarding cultural differences that can influence communication and ultimately marriage. The findings of the research, which examined communication patterns among Chinese, Western, and intercultural Chinese-Western couples, indicated that Chinese female partners exhibited fewer positive behaviors and more negative behaviors compared to Western female partners. Notably, the cultural background of the male partner had limited impact on the communication behavior of the couple. Therefore, the researchers concluded that culture can affect communication between couples, especially when there is a difference in the culture of both the spouses (Hiew et al., 2016). Communication can also be greatly impacted by one's perspective of their relationship. The research's findings indicated that couples with higher satisfaction levels generally displayed more positive behaviors, fewer negative behaviors, and more effective communication. Hence, a correlation between communication and satisfaction in marital relations was found (Lavner et al, 2016).

Communication patterns and styles can vary among the same culture too. The most important individual differences which can influence one's communication is their gender. A research reveals that this variable has a vital role in the development of marital bond. Variations in the criteria of marriage, the communication style employed, and the gender differences between the two partners all influence the emotional connection after the marriage has taken place (Habibi et al., 2018). In addition, another research yielded similar results by concluding that the communication patterns can vary among genders both before and after marriage (Lavner et al., 2016). Following the same train of thought, another researcher analyzed communication styles, pre- and post-marital requirements, and love types. It looked at the ways in which couples communicate, select spouses, and express their

love. Males and women had different pre- and post-marriage standards, while couples older than 30 had specific pre- and post-marriage criteria. In the emotional relationship after marriage, research has revealed that the marital requirements, communication style, and gender disparities between partners are all significant aspects. Hence, emotional connection and marital satisfaction are influenced by marriage's requirements, communication methods, and gender disparities (Habibi et al., 2018). Under the same context, another research highlighted how Malaysian individuals respond during couple conflicts (accommodation response) and when their partner shares good news (capitalization response) and how this correlates with their marital satisfaction. The findings revealed that an active-constructive response communicating regarding the problems and trying to resolve them) had the greatest impact on relationship satisfaction in both capitalization and accommodation scenarios. These findings emphasize the importance of conflict resolution and maximizing positive aspects within relationships for overall well-being of the relationship (De Netto et al., 2021).

**Figure 1: Proposed Theoretical Framework for the Research**



Marital satisfaction is a multifaceted term that covers a wide array of concepts. However, according to Locke in 1968, "marital satisfaction can be defined as the process of adaptation of the both partners in such a way as to avoid or resolve conflicts sufficiently so that the mates feel satisfied with the marriage and each other" (Ayub, 2010).

This complex term includes the interplay of several variables related to one's marriage. The first factor is sexual satisfaction – which can be denoted as being able to fulfill the sexual needs of your partner. According to one interpretation, sexual satisfaction is an emotive reaction that derives from an individual's perspective of positive and negative when it comes to sexual connection (Lawrance & Byers, 1995). The second factor is communication which is integral when it comes to marital satisfaction. It is the ability to vocalize one's thoughts and feelings to the other partner while also being capable of understanding their partner's thoughts and feelings. It was proposed by Dewey (1916), communication is referred to as a shared experience till it becomes a common possession (Steibel, 1955). In present times communication can be described as multiple-domain exchanges of



verbal and nonverbal symbols and signs. The third factor, that is understanding, is having the potential to comprehend each other's ideas and perceptions and retaining any biases. The concept of understanding should not be regarded primarily as an expression of one's subjective perspective, but rather as a process of situating oneself within a tradition where the past and present continuously intertwine (Frazier, 2023). The fourth factor is spouse support which can be categorized in terms of instrumental support (time, money, resources), informational support (advice and opinions), and emotional support (empathy, love, and trust). Spouse support specifically for women plays the role of buffer for positive relationship outcomes like being content with one's marriage as well as the enactment of goal (Kim, 2022). The fifth factor is the education level which is the degree, diploma, and highest certificate. Successful completion of the highest level of education is described as educational attainment where competencies, skills, and acquired knowledge are evaluated. When both partners in a romantic relationship work for a living, they can be considered as dual earners, which is the sixth factor. A dual-earning couple is characterized by a cohabiting partnership in which both individuals are actively employed in the labor market. On the other hand, a dual-career couple refers to a specific type of dual-earning couple in which both partners are not only employed but also dedicated to building successful careers (Boye, 2014). The seventh factor is the presence of children as parents withhold the responsibilities of nurturing and providing for their child(ren)'s (adopted, biological, or step) needs. Relation with in-laws is considered as the eighth factor contributing to marital satisfaction. It can be described as a relation which one holds with the family of their spouse. The ninth factor is the husband's financial status. It can be defined as a composite measure of an individual's position in society relative to others based on criteria including wealth, education, and occupation. The existence of distinct financial statuses and classes has a significant impact on marital satisfaction. The tenth factor is gender difference. A research's findings highlight a greater concern harboured by females regarding companionship, affection, expecting emotional support and expectations which denote the existence of gender differences in marital satisfaction (Weishaus & Field, 1988). The eleventh and last factor is compromise. As the relationship progresses, a level of understanding develops between the couple regarding money, parenting or recreation. Agreement or sacrifice is required from one or both the sides in order to achieve understanding – this can be developed through a compromise (Ayub, 2010).

Moreover, the term, body image, appears in the picture. Literature provides evidence on how one's body image can impact their perceived marital satisfaction. This concept is relatively simpler and more straightforward. Nonetheless, it has various distinct ideas associated with it. One definition attempt to comprehensively explain the complexity in a few words. According to a researcher, "body

image is the structure of perceptions, feelings, and attitudes induced by (or expressed towards) our own bodies” (Fisher et al., 2019).

Earlier studies have also indicated that an individual's level of satisfaction with their marital relationship can be influenced by their communication skills. Iturralde (2003) put forward a definition suggesting that communication serves as the behavioral system that adjusts, regulates, sustains, and enables relationships among individuals. Therefore, researching human interactions and behaviors would be incomplete without considering the role of communication (Iglesias-García et al., 2019).

Similarly, communication in marital relationships has been theorized to have two types: positive and negative. According to Aragón and Díaz Loving (2003), individuals exhibiting a positive communication style are characterized by their ability to effectively convey their thoughts and emotions to their partners. They exhibit warmth, openness, friendliness, cooperation, attentiveness, understanding, and a strong inclination towards communication. Their approach is one of respect, emphasizing a high degree of explicit self-disclosure. On the other hand, the negative communication style is characterized by a preference for indirect verbal expression and limited openness, despite a notable level of self-disclosure, often complemented by non-verbal cues. Individuals who adopt this style tend to diminish the significance of their partner's experiences, engage in insufficient sharing of information, frequently express disagreement, actively provoke conflicts, and consistently focus on finding faults in others and their surroundings. Their behaviors and attitudes may appear more focused on provoking irritation rather than facilitating effective communication, as they exhibit a predisposition towards criticism rather than valuing the perspectives of their counterparts (Iglesias-García et al., 2019).

In order to explore the relationship between these variables, a certain age bracket was selected which would be representative of married young adults. According to Erick Erickson's theory, individuals in the intimacy vs isolation psychosocial stage are in the process of forming romantic bonds and seeking to meet their intimacy needs. Hence, by exploring marital satisfaction during this stage, the current research can unravel the intimacy patterns that emerge and are influenced by communication and body image (Parasandi, 2021).

### **Problem Statement:**

Marital satisfaction plays a crucial role in establishing healthy and stable relationships while also contributing to the overall well-being of individuals. Factors such as body image perception and communication patterns are recognized as significant determinants of marital satisfaction,

particularly in Western cultures where researchers have focused on studying their influence. However, limited research exists on these specific dynamics and their association with marital satisfaction within the cultural context of Pakistan.

The understanding and acknowledgment of factors influencing marital satisfaction vary across cultures and countries (Ayub et al., 2023). Unlike Western societies, Pakistani culture is characterized by collectivism and strong cultural norms. In this cultural setting, body image perceptions and communication patterns are not typically considered as key determinants of marital satisfaction, and using body image perception as a predictor of marital satisfaction is thought to be deviant. Instead, research suggests that Pakistani culture strongly emphasizes the endorsement of Family Responsibility relationship standards (Iqbal et al., 2019; Halford et al., 2018).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that in the cultural context of Pakistan, body image dissatisfaction has often been associated solely with women. However, literature suggests that there are no substantial gender differences in body image perception (Shaheen et al., 2016). This highlights the need to challenge the prevailing notion and broaden the understanding of body image concerns in Pakistani society.

In summary, while body image perception and communication patterns are recognized as influential factors in marital satisfaction in Western cultures, their significance may vary within the cultural context of Pakistan. In today's time, with increased attention on marital satisfaction among young married adults, it is important to bridge the research gap and identify whether body image and communication contribute to marital satisfaction, and if body image can predict marital satisfaction, particularly among Pakistani couples.

### **Rationale and Significance of the Research**

The main aim of this research is to examine and analyze how individuals' body image perception and communication patterns influence their marital satisfaction. While previous research has explored the potential significance of body image and communication in shaping marital satisfaction in Western contexts, there is a significant research gap, particularly regarding Pakistani couples.

With the growing significance of marital satisfaction for overall well-being amongst married individuals, the purpose of this research is to fill this research gap by investigating the correlation between body image, communication, and marital satisfaction among young married adults in Pakistan. Considering the growing rate of relationship problems and divorces in Pakistan, it is important to explore if body image perception plays a role. In current times, endorsement of

whitening creams and cosmetic surgeries is increasing drastically, indicating that individuals are concerned with their body image, and want to endorse the type of body that is considered to be ideal. To add on, the commercial advertisements are also setting unrealistic standards of how one's body should look, forcing individuals who do not fit according to the standards to develop a negative body image perception. Thus, the research will explore the potential influence of cultural norms, beliefs, and values on individuals' perceptions of their physical appearance and how these perceptions impact their marital satisfaction.

Furthermore, by exploring the role of communication, the research will delve into the extent to which effective communication strategies can either buffer or enhance satisfaction within marital relationships. This aspect of the research aims to understand how communication patterns contribute to marital satisfaction in the Pakistani cultural context.

Moreover, the results of this research hold practical implications that can be applied in real-world settings, as they can inform the development of culturally sensitive interventions and strategies. By understanding the factors that influence body image perception and marital satisfaction within the Pakistani culture, interventions and counseling approaches can be tailored specifically to address the requirements of individuals within this particular context.

Overall, this research will provide valuable insights to both the academic and clinical fields, guiding the development of interventions and counseling approaches that are culturally appropriate and effective for individuals within the Pakistani culture.

### **Research Objectives**

- To explore the relationship between marital satisfaction and body image.
- To explore the relationship between marital satisfaction and communication.
- To explore if body image can predict marital satisfaction.

### **Research Questions**

- Is there a relationship between marital satisfaction and body image?
- Is there a relationship between marital satisfaction and communication?
- Is body image a predictor of marital satisfaction?

### **Hypotheses**

- There will be a relationship between marital satisfaction and body image.

- There will be a relationship between marital satisfaction and communication.
- Body image will predict marital satisfaction.

## METHOD

### Research Design

The current research is a quantitative approach based on correlational design. Data was gathered using questionnaires about body image, marital satisfaction, and communication.

### Participants

The target population of the research were married individuals (equal number of males and females) residing in Pakistan, and aged between 18 to 40 years. This is the young adulthood stage, where, according to Erickson's psychosocial developmental stages, individuals are looking forward to developing close intimate relationships. The participants were approached through snowball sampling.

### Inclusion Criteria:

- Married males and females
- Individuals aged between 18 to 40 years.
- Falls under the marriage duration of 2 months to 7 years.
- Has at least completed Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC)
- Is able to read, understand, and write English language
- Is not diagnosed with any mental illness, and does not take any medications.

### Exclusion Criteria:

- Unmarried, separated, or divorced males and females
- Individuals aged below 18 years or above 40 years.
- Married for less than 2 months or more than 7 years.
- Has not completed Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC)
- Unable to read, understand, and write English language
- Diagnosed with any mental illness, and does not take any medications.

## Measures

### Consent Form

At the start of the research, the participants were provided with a consent form that was in accordance with the ethical guidelines. It provided a brief description of the research. Additionally, the consent form also provided an insight about how the collected data will be handled. The data collection was only proceeded after the participants had thoroughly read and signed the consent form.

### Demographic Form

The participants filled out a form with basic information such as the participant's age, the participant's spouse's age, employment status, socioeconomic status, family structure, the duration of the marriage, number of children, etc., which might be helpful for the researchers.

### Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS; Ayub, 2010)

A questionnaire measure called the “Marital Satisfaction Scale”, which was developed by Nadia Ayub (2010), with Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.699, was used to gather the data. There were 33 questions in the questionnaire. Likert scale replies were given on a scale of 0 to 3, with 3 representing "always" and 0 representing "never."

### Body-Image Questionnaire (BIQ; Koleck et al., 1987)

A questionnaire measure called the “Body-Image Questionnaire”, which was developed by Michele Koleck, Marilou Bruchon Schweitzer, Florence Cousson-Gélie, Jerome Gilliard, and Bruno Quintard (1987), with Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.83, was used to gather the data. There were 19 questions in the questionnaire. Semantic Differential scale replies were given on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 and 5 representing "very much, often", 2 and 4 representing "fairly, fairly often" and 3 representing "in between, neither one".

### Self-perceived Communication in the Couple Relationship (SCCR; Iglesias-García et al., 2019)

A questionnaire measure called the “Self-perceived Communication in the Couple Relationship”, which was developed by María-Teresa Iglesias-García, Antonio Urbano-Contreras, and Raquel-Amaya Martínez-González (2019), with Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.75 as a whole, 0.79 for Factor 1 and 0.73 for Factor 2, was used to gather the data. There were 8 questions in the questionnaire. Likert scale replies were given on a scale of 1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree.



## Procedure

A total of 200 Participants, equal number of married males and females, were identified via snowball sampling and were reached out through religious places, educational institutions, social gatherings and different workplaces and events. The participants were provided with the consent form, demographic form, marital satisfaction scale, body-image questionnaire and self-perceived communication in the couple relationship. The data was gathered from the filled forms and was further analyzed on SPSS for correlation, regression and independent samples t-test. The acquired results were interpreted.

The research has been designed with careful consideration of the ethical guidelines set by the American Psychological Association. All the researchers while carrying out research had abided by the ethical guidelines. First and foremost is choice of participation, where participants chose to participate while being free from any pressure or compulsion in the current research. Consent in the form of a proper consent form was signed by the participant where the aim of the research was clearly stated. With this, the presence of an option to withdraw at any time during the research, if needed, was given. In order to avoid the inconvenience of withdrawing from in-between, deception was not practiced with the participants and the main aim of the research was shared with them. Confidentiality was also ensured for the participants. Since personal information of each participant will be shared, assurance that all identifying information about them will be removed from the report was given. While making sure no information of the participants was leaked to save them from any societal judgment, they were also protected from any type of physical, psychological or legal harm.

## RESULTS

This chapter covers the statistical analysis of results to explore the relationship between marital satisfaction with body image and communication among married couples in Pakistan. It discusses the demographic variables alongside descriptive statistics of the primary variables and examines their correlations, regression, and independent samples t-test.

**Table 1***Frequency and Percentages of Demographic Variables (N=200)*

Variables	F	%
Age		
Gender		
Female	115	57.5
Male	85	42.5
Education		
High School	7	3.5
College Graduate	27	13.5
Bachelor's Degree	96	48
Master's Degree	70	35
Employment		
Employed	125	62.5
Unemployed	75	37.5
Socioeconomic Status		
Upper Class	17	8.5
Upper Middle Class	68	34
Middle Class	107	53.5
Lower Middle Class	7	3.5
Lower Class	1	0.5
Current family structure		
Nuclear family	72	36
Joint family	128	64
Age gap between spouse and self		
0-2 years	84	42
3-5 years	73	36.5
6-10 years	38	19
11+ years	5	2.5
Presence of children		
Biological	107	53.5
Step	-	
Adopted	-	
None	93	46.5
Number of Children		

Table 1 depicts the frequency of participants according to their respective demographic details such as age, gender, education, employment, socioeconomic status, current family structure, age gap between spouse and self, presence of children and number of children where applicable. The sample consisted of married individuals whose marriage duration ranged from 2 months to 7 years.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Reliability Coefficients for Marital Satisfaction Scale, its subscales, Body Image Questionnaire and Self-Perceived Communication in the Couple Relationship Scale and its subscales (N=200)*

Variables	Items	$\alpha$	$M$	$SD$	SK	K	Range	
							Actual	Potential
MS	33	0.819	68.620	11.281	-0.212	0.752	31-99	0-99
RI	3	0.821	5.675	1.851	0.608	-0.195	0-9	0-9
CMN	3	0.376	7.430	1.831	-1.165	0.601	1-9	0-9
HFS	3	0.666	6.8201	1.883	-0.809	0.500	0-9	0-9
CMP	3	0.395	7.010	1.601	-0.558	-0.027	1-9	0-9
SS	3	0.473	7.405	1.681	-1.472	3.059	0-9	0-9
GD	3	0.493	6.215	1.722	-0.427	-0.003	1-9	0-9
DE	3	0.407	5.160	2.130	-0.230	-0.379	0-9	0-9
ES	3	0.515	6.300	1.965	-0.490	-0.200	0-9	0-9
PC	3	0.557	4.975	2.163	-0.278	-0.320	0-9	0-9
UN	3	0.515	5.750	1.552	0.139	-0.375	2-9	0-9
SLS	3	0.012	7.470	1.662	-1.114	0.658	0-9	0-9
BI	19	0.793	67.535	9.501	0.127	-0.086	42-95	19-95
C	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PC	4	0.805	6.560	2.627	0.960	0.357	4-15	1-16
NC	4	0.731	11.950	2.879	-0.584	-0.257	4-16	1-16

*Note.* MS=Marital Satisfaction, RI=Relationship with In-Laws, CMN=Communication, HFS=Husband Financial Status, CMP=Compromise, SS=Spouse Support, GD=Gender Difference, DE=Dual Earning, ES=Education of Spouse, PC=Presence of Children, UN=Understanding, SLS=Sexual Satisfaction, BI=Body Image, C=Communication, PC=Positive Communication, NC=Negative Communication, SK=Skewness, K=Kurtosis

Table 2 depicts the values of Cronbach Alpha reliability, Mean, Standard Deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis for the Marital Satisfaction, Body Image and Communication scales. The Alpha Reliabilities of Marital Satisfaction, Body Image and Positive and Negative Communication scales were 0.819, 0.793, 0.805 and 0.731 respectively, all of which lie in the acceptable range. The values of skewness and kurtosis lie between -1 to +1 for the main scales which indicates a normally distributed data.

**Table 3**

*Pearson Product Moment Product Correlation of Marital Satisfaction with Body Image and Communication (N=70)*

Variables	Marital Satisfaction	Body Image	Communication	
			Negative Communication	Positive Communication
Marital Satisfaction	1	0.272*	0.194*	-0.444**
Relationship with In-Laws	0.319**	0.120	0.040	-0.204
Communication (MS)	0.588**	0.388**	0.289**	-0.514**
Husband Financial Status	0.545**	0.198	0.311*	-0.369**
Compromise	0.473**	0.251**	0.316**	-0.138
Spouse Support	0.560**	0.285**	0.163	-0.316**
Gender Difference	0.051	-0.200	-0.158	0.173
Dual Earning	0.257*	-0.130	-0.133	0.031
Education of Spouse	0.409**	0.061	-0.089	-0.222
Presence of Children	-0.016	-0.164	-0.196	0.136
Understanding	0.376**	0.070	0.154	0.056
Sexual Satisfaction	0.515**	0.543**	0.310**	-0.552**
Body Image	0.272*	1	0.365**	-0.447**
Communication				
Positive Communication	-0.444**	-0.447**	1	1
Negative Communication	0.194*	0.365**	1	1

Note. \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 indicates a weak yet significant positive correlation between marital satisfaction and body image at  $r=0.272^*$ . This reflects an increase in marital satisfaction as one's body image improves or becomes more positive in nature. The results also depict a weak yet significant negative correlation between marital satisfaction and positive communication at  $r=-0.444^{**}$ . The scale's results suggest that a lower score obtained in positive communication reflects a greater engagement in positive communication which results in higher marital satisfaction. Similarly, there was a weak yet significant positive correlation between marital satisfaction and negative communication at

$r=0.194^{**}$ . The scale's results suggest that a higher score obtained in negative communication reflects a lesser engagement in negative communication which results in higher marital satisfaction.

**Table 4**

*Simple Linear Regression Analysis Showing Body Image (BI) as a Predictor of Marital Satisfaction (N=70)*

	Marital satisfaction							
	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	B	t	p	95% CI	
							LL	UL
Body image	0.272	0.074	0.060	0.272	2.328	0.023	0.028	0.362

Note.  $\beta$ =Standardized beta, R<sup>2</sup>=R-squared,  $\Delta R^2$ =Adjusted R-squared CI=Confidence Interval, LL=Lower limit, UL=Upper limit

In Table 4, marital satisfaction was established to be significantly and positively predicted by body image in regression at  $r=0.272$ . This shows that body image can play the role as a predictor of marital satisfaction and can influence one's perspective and feelings on their marriage. Hence, an increase in positive body image perceptions will lead to an increase in marital satisfaction.

**Table 5**

*Independent Sample T-test for Marital Satisfaction, Body Image and Communication according to Gender (N=70)*

Variables	Female (n=34)		Male (n=36)		t(68)	p	Cohen's d	95% CI	
	M	SD	M	SD				LL	UL
Marital Satisfaction	58.147	6.056	55.806	8.444	1.326	0.189	0.319	-1.181	5.864
Body Image	64.294	9.849	68.333	10.567	-1.652	0.103	0.395	-8.918	0.840
Communication Positive	7.294	3.050	8.222	2.880	-1.309	0.195	0.313	-2.342	0.486
Communication Negative	11.853	3.534	11.917	2.771	-0.084	0.933	0.020	-1.574	1.446

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

Table 5 denotes no significant difference in marital satisfaction ( $p=0.189$ ), body image ( $p=0.103$ ), positive communication ( $p=0.195$ ) and negative communication ( $p=0.933$ ) among both the genders.

## DISCUSSION

The current chapter will explore the findings of the results presented in the preceding chapter in aiming to create an improved in depth understanding of the context of previous work. This chapter also includes the limitations, recommendations and future implications for further study. The current research aimed to study the relationship between marital satisfaction with body image and communication married couples in Pakistan. Three hypotheses were tested on the basis of objectives of the research, addressing the relation between marital satisfaction and communication, the relation between marital satisfaction and body image and lastly body image will predict marital satisfaction.

The first hypotheses stated that there would be a relationship between marital satisfaction and body image. The result of this hypotheses was proved right as it suggests that there is a positive correlation between marital satisfaction and body image (see Table 3). The findings from this research are consistent with existing literature on the topic. Previous research implies that women withholding a positive body image are seen to have greater confidence in their partners' ongoing acceptance, leading them to be more willing to take necessary emotional risks to sustain the relationship. On the contrary, women who withhold a negative body image may have doubts about their partners' continued acceptance, making them less inclined to take crucial emotional risks (Roels & Janssen, 2020).

The second hypothesis stated that there is a relationship between marital satisfaction and communication. The hypothesis was validated through the results which found that positive communication has a negative relationship with marital satisfaction and negative communication has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction (see Table 3). Previous scholarly work shows that couples who reported higher levels of satisfaction demonstrated more positive, less negative, and more effective communication. In the longitudinal analysis, both the association between communication and satisfaction and the association between satisfaction and communication were identified, but neither pathway exhibited significant strength. A previous investigation suggested that there exists a strong correlation between the communication skills of couples. Additionally, the findings indicate that couples who possess strong communication skills exhibit greater spousal compatibility in various aspects of their relationship compared to those with weaker communication skills. These results emphasize the importance of focusing on communication skills to promote spousal compatibility and prevent conflicts within the relationship (Alayi et al., 2011).

The third and final hypothesis put forward a prediction that body image will predict marital



satisfaction. The hypothesis was established as accurate since according to the regression analysis conducted for the results, body image has been identified as a significant predictor of marital satisfaction (see Table 4). Previous research has indicated that body image factors play a significant role in predicting marital satisfaction among married individuals. Therefore, it can be concluded that body image holds a crucial position in determining marital pleasure (Azra Shaheen et al., 2016). Prior research implies that women who have a positive body image tend to have higher confidence in their partners' ongoing acceptance, leading them to be more willing to take necessary emotional risks to sustain the relationship. On the contrary, women withholding a negative body image are more prone to doubting their partners' continued acceptance, which may make them less inclined to take such crucial emotional risks (Schmidt et al., 2023).

## **Conclusion**

This research aimed to study the relationship of body image and communication with the marital satisfaction of young married adults, and if body image can predict the marital satisfaction of individuals. Three hypotheses were tested on the basis of the objectives of the research, addressing the correlation between the variables of study and regression between the variables of study. The results found a positive and a significant correlation between body image and marital satisfaction. Further, it was identified that positive communication is negatively correlated with marital satisfaction and negative communication is positively correlated with marital satisfaction. Similarly, positive communication is negatively correlated with body image and negative communication is positively correlated with body image. Lastly, in regression, body image was identified to positively and significantly predict marital satisfaction

## **Limitations and Recommendations of the Research**

While this research has provided significant insights into the relationship of body image and communication with marital satisfaction, however, there are a few limitations in the research which need to be considered. Firstly, people were reluctant to fill in the body image questionnaire. In Pakistani cultural context, talking about body image in one's marriage is a stigma and is considered to be deviant, and married couples tend to not openly talk about it in their marriage, hence reluctance from people was observed. Further, the research's sample size was only 200 participants, and the data was collected from Karachi only, leading to limiting the scope of the research.

The relationship between body image and marital satisfaction and the role of communication has been extensively studied in the West, however, research on these research variables is limited in

Pakistani cultural context, and since in this cultural context, body image is not openly talked about and people are reluctant when asked about it, therefore, interventions can be developed for people who have negative body image perception. Additionally, awareness sessions can also be conducted on how body image shouldn't be a stigma in marriages. Further, focus groups can also be considered through which one can righteously identify the stigma behind the scene, and a qualitative approach can be used whereby the construct of marital satisfaction can be explored and studied under different factors. Lastly, in order to ensure research is more generalizable, larger sample size and conducting the research in other regions of the country should be considered.

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