



**A study on Mental Health and Life Satisfaction among married women and Brahma
Kumari's of India**

Jasleen Kour

Ph.D. Scholar, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Jasleenisher15@gmail.com

Abstract

Brahma Kumari's is a popular spiritual organisation led by women that originated in India (Hyderabad), but now is spread across almost 137 countries. Marriage is often said to be a major correlate of quality of life. One measure of the "apparent" quality of life is life satisfaction. It shows how well people thrive when combined with measures of their physical and mental wellbeing. The present research aimed to study two female samples' level of life satisfaction and mental health based on their marital status, one married (N=30) and the other unmarried, commonly called as Brahma Kumari's in India (N=30). The correlations were found significant. The t-test of significance was also applied for the two samples. The difference between married and unmarried sample for life satisfaction and mental health was found to be significant, with unmarried sample having higher levels of mental health and life

satisfaction. Spirituality can be a source of happiness and life satisfaction for not just unmarried people but larger sections of society. It has scope to transform mankind for greater good.

Key words: Mental Health, Life Satisfaction, Marriage, Celibacy, Brahma Kumari's

Introduction

From the perspective of positive psychology, life satisfaction and mental health are integral for part of well-being. Life satisfaction is considered as a desirable goal by everyone. Mental health signifies harmony in social relationships, health, work related conditions, personal welfare, liberty, moral values and personality traits and correlates with life satisfaction. These variables are studied in the context of marital status of females. Marriage is one of the most intense relationship that we form in our lifetime. The fact that marriage is universal does not imply that marriage occurs in every society. Many feminist theories suggest marriage has been more central to women's identity than men and has played more consequential for their mental health than men. It is so because they are typically more emotionally involved in nurturing roles, like, that of a wife or a caregiver, while husbands mostly engage themselves in non-emotional roles like the bread earner of the family (Loscocco & Walzer, 2013). Often it is asserted that marriage can sometimes have no, or even adverse consequences as opposed to typical theories that suggest it enhances overall psychological and physical resources (Liu et al., 2010; Williams & Umberson, 2004). Socioeconomic differences, parenthood and differences in psychological resources are said to be major factors for mental health differences in married couples (Uecker, 2012).

Apart from this viewpoint, marriage remains only one of the correlates of mental health and life satisfaction. Singlehood is gaining lot of popularity lately. Studies have shown that single

or unmarried people sometimes have better mental health than married individuals. For example, Uecker (2012) suggests that people who get married early at teenage or early 20s do not have positive mental health associated with marriage. Divorces are common for early marriages (Lehrer, 2008).

Marriage and Mental health

Mental health is the absence of physical and psychological illness. World Health Organization specifies self-efficacy, self-sufficiency, proficiency, and realisation of one's potential as main components of mental health. In simpler terms, mental health includes ability to enjoy life, balance between different parts of life and face challenges with resilience. Traditionally, it is accepted that marriage as an institution is essential for overall well-being and strengthening one's abilities to deal with life crisis (Uecker, 2012). It is clear that it is hard to argue against the positive effects of marriage on emotional well-being (Carr & Springer, 2011). One of many reasons for this link is the range of benefits coming out of marriage like intimacy and companionship. In a longitudinal study of young adults, it was found that subjects who married and stayed married had better well-being than the singles (Horwitz et al., 1996). Feminist suggests marriage has been more central to women's identity than men and has played more far-reaching role for their mental health than men. It is so because they are typically more emotionally involved in nurturing roles; for example, wife or caregiver, while husbands mostly engage themselves in non-emotional roles (Loscocco & Walzer, 2013). Studies have also found that marriage does not always lead to better mental health. Failed marriages are followed by mental health crisis. Researcher have argued that the positive relationship between marriage and mental health can be explained as healthy people getting married and not that marriage makes people happy (Horwitz et al., 1996; Stutzer & Frey, 2006)). Interestingly, priesthood

and celibacy, too, often have been positively correlated to happiness and high levels of life satisfaction. People who willingly choose to stay single believe that marriage, sex or family may be pleasurable and bring joy to one's life but they are not the definitive resort for happiness. Additionally, states that mental health is impacted by ideas of masculinity and femininity in a number of ways, including stressors, coping mechanisms, social interactions, and personal resources.

Marriage and Life satisfaction

Happiness is an in-the-moment experience, while life satisfaction takes into account the big picture, the whole life in general. Life satisfaction can be called as one's own cognitive judgments of what one considers to be valuable in life. In general, whatever level of satisfaction one is feeling, he can define and maximize his level of wellbeing if he chooses which elements he wants to engage in to flourish (Seligman, 2011). Veenhoven (1996) states life satisfaction to be the extent to which an individual feels satisfied with the general quality of their life is known as life satisfaction. Also, life satisfaction tends to be dependent on one's emotional state. Uecker (2012) found that young married adults showed higher levels of life satisfaction than those in any type of relationship. On the contrary, Hasnain et al., (2011) found no significant differences between married and unmarried women for life satisfaction and self-esteem. Huang et al., (2016) also illustrated that married women living in rural China had low levels of Life satisfaction. Mikucka (2016) further asserts that life satisfaction advantage of being married decreases over time among men but not among women through his research. Friediger (1983) also argues that married women's sources of life happiness are influenced by the roles they play.

PURPOSE

1. To study difference between two samples (married women and unmarried Brahma Kumari's), on the dimensions of life satisfaction and mental health.
2. To study the relationship between life satisfaction and mental health for the selected sample.

HYPOTHESES

Based on the review of literature the following hypotheses have been proposed:

1. There exists no difference between married women and unmarried Brahma Kumari's for mental health.
2. There exists no difference between married women and unmarried Brahma Kumari's for life satisfaction.
3. There exists a positive relationship between life satisfaction and mental health for both married women and Brahma Kumari's.

SAMPLE

A sample of 60 females was selected randomly, 30 married and 30 unmarried (Brahma kumari's) in the city of Chandigarh. The unmarried sample is drawn from women leading spiritual lives popularly known by the name of Brahma Kumari's, who had never been married. They were engaged in voluntary celibacy but lived with their families. The age the sample fell into was from 25-50 years. The unmarried sample was purposively drawn from Brahma Kumaris centre whereas married was randomly selected.

MEASURES

1. **Satisfaction with Life Scale** developed by Deiner (1985) is a 5-item test that assesses a person's overall life satisfaction based on cognitive judgements rather than measuring happy or negative affect. It is based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The test has favourable psychometric properties (Deiner et al.,1985).
2. **Positive Mental Health Scale** as developed by Luket et al., (2016) with 9 item version was used to assess overall positive mental health. It is based on 9-point Likert scale with satisfactory reliability and validity.

PROCEDURE

The questionnaires were filled by the subjects under the supervision of the researcher. The study used two questionnaires: Satisfaction with Life Assessment by Deiner (1985) and WHO Measure of Mental Health adapted for use in India by Wigs (1999). Any doubts regarding the questions were clarified. Some of the data was also collected through Google forms, but only in the presence of the researcher. The data was then tabulated to find out the correlation and t test was used.

RESULTS**Table 1**

Correlation among variables mental health and life satisfaction for married and unmarried sample

		Mental health	Life satisfaction
(Married)	Mental health	-	0.582*
(Unmarried)	Life satisfaction	0.409*	-

Note . * $p < .05$

Table 2

T- test measure for life satisfaction for married and unmarried sample

Life Satisfaction	Mean	S.D.	t ratio	p
Married	25.30	5.03	3.782	0.0004
Unmarried	30.40	5.41		

Note. * $p < 0.05$

Table 3*T- test measure for mental health for married and unmarried sample*

Mental health	Mean	S.D.	t- ratio	p
Married	13.57	2.34	2.23	0.029
Unmarried	14.70	1.49		

Note. * $p < 0.05$ **DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The present study was aimed at studying the two female sample population differing on the basis of their marital status, one was married (N=30) and the other was unmarried, called by the name of Brahma Kumaris in India (N=30). The correlation between life satisfaction and mental health for the married sample came out to be significant ($r=0.582$, $p= 0.05$) as shown in Table 1 and the correlation for the unmarried sample came out to be ($r=0.409$, $p= 0.05$). Although it is technically a positive correlation the relationship between the variables is moderate.

The test of significance was also applied for the two samples. The difference between married ($M = 25.30$, $S.D = 5.03$) and unmarried sample ($M = 30.40$, $S.D = 5.41$) for life satisfaction $t(58) = 3.782$, $p = 0.0004$ was found to be significant as shown in Table 2 and the difference between married ($M = 13.57$, $S.D = 2.34$) and unmarried sample ($M = 14.70$, $S.D = 1.49$) for mental health $t(58) = 2.23$, $p = 0.029$ was also found to be significant as shown in Table 3. Therefore, the

results suggests that unmarried Brahma Kumari's are higher on Life satisfaction and mental health as compared to married women. The results of the study fail to accept the three null hypotheses. The results of the study are consistent with earlier researches.

Marriage undoubtedly signifies important changes in one's social status as well as psychological well-being. Apart from serving the universal need for sexual gratification it also serves a way of companionship for a lifetime. However, the results are contradictory to typical marriage theories that declare it to enhance psychological resources. More autonomy and freedom in decision making in an unmarried life is often associated to a sense of control over one's life. For instance, Frazier et al. (1996) investigated 217 single adults of the age 30 about their reasons for remaining single, desire for marriage, and level of life satisfaction and found more men than women wanted to get married. Interestingly, divorced women showed more life satisfaction than married ones. Clearly, it can be stated that marriage does not always promise positive outcomes. Current study's findings can also be attributed to the spiritual lives led by the unmarried sample. Better scores on mental health and life satisfaction can also be attributed to meditation effects. Meditation offers various benefits, including stress and emotion management, better physical health (stable heartrate, blood pressure, increased immunity) and positive psychological effects (forgiveness and well-being) (Oken, 2016). Bozek et al. (2020) also confirms that a positive relationship exists between spirituality, health related behaviours and psychological well-being. Barett (1999) also argues that social support along with marital status is a better predictor of life satisfaction. In famous book, "Why Priests are Happy: A Study of the Psychological and Spiritual Health of Priest", it is again professed that spiritual people are better well-adjusted in life (Rossetti, 2011). Pandya (2019) also found that meditation has a positive impact on happiness and life satisfaction of the participants at a customized Raja yoga meditation program. The study gives evidence that unmarried sample

fares well on the variables like life satisfaction and mental health if supported by spirituality and meaning to life.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the present study that marriage does not always promise better mental health and life satisfaction. Many variables other than marital status can lead well-being. We can also not contest the benefits of married life through the study since many other findings direct in the opposite direction. Friediger (1983) for example, also asserts that married people's sources of life happiness are influenced by the roles they play rather than their mere marital status. Other factors must be studied to understand the true difference between the two lifestyles. It would not be wrong to say that it is impossible to adopt an extreme stance regarding the superiority of a married or single lifestyle but words from the book "Why Priests Are Happy: A Study of the Psychological and Spiritual Health of Priests" Rossetti (2011) can help us understand the essence of living a flourishing life,

"I found that when priests live priesthood well, when they live it the way it is supposed to be lived, they are happier people. "That is true of all walks of life. In your marriage or your job or whatever you are doing, when you live it right; with integrity, with honesty, with good Christian values, you are going to be a happier person."

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