

Gender differences in perception of locus of control and marital adjustment among married couples

NEHA SHARMA, JASLEEN* AND NEETU BHARADWAJ

Department of Human Development and Family Relations
Government Home Science College, Panjab University, Chandigarh (U.T.) India

ABSTRACT

The present study entitled “Gender differences in perception of locus of control and marital adjustment among married couples” was undertaken to assess the level of happiness among married couples and to examine the contribution of locus of control and perceived marital adjustment on the happiness of married couples. Oxford Happiness Inventory, Levenson’s Multidimensional Locus of Control Scale and Marital Adjustment Questionnaire were administered on 100 married couples (26-35 years of age). The results revealed that the major proportion of married couples reported happiness at high levels. The husbands perceived more happiness and powerful others controls compared to wives whereas wives reported significantly higher marital adjustment, internal and chance control as compared to husbands. The wives reported significantly higher marital adjustment as compared to husbands. The gender differences in mean scores in the perception of locus of control among married couples revealed to be significant for chance scale only and non-significant for internal scale and powerful others. The wives perceived significantly slightly higher internal control as compared to their husbands followed by powerful others scale which recorded that husbands to have higher control as compared to their wives. The results on chance scale wives to be higher on this dimension as compared to their husbands.

Key Words : Happiness, Marital adjustment, Locus of control, Protective factor, Risk factor

INTRODUCTION

Marriage has been considered to be one of the most important institutions which affects people’s life and well-being. Marital institution regulates sexual relations and encourages commitment between spouses. This commitment has positive effects on spouses’ health and their earnings on the labor market. In most societies, marriage is considered to be one pivotal life event for both men and women, for a variety of other life changes, including the formation of a new family or a new part of an extended family (Karkal and Rajan, 1989).

The quest for happiness and joy in humans leads to marriage. Marriage is a lifelong interpersonal relationship between man and woman as husband and wife which is governed by legal, religious and customary principles. When spouses get along with each other to achieve a

harmonious working relationship in different areas of their marital life, an adjustment is achieved. Marriage would become a more individualistic process, to be entered into, for love and self-fulfillment rather than for traditional family concerns. The spread of education and employment served as a strong impetus to this independence, especially in terms of better and more equal options for women. The substantial gains made by young women in the fronts of education and employment were thought to be reflected in more egalitarian and conjugally oriented marriages (Malhotra, 1996). Hence, the attitude towards marriage acted as an indicator of social development.

Efforts have been made to identify the objective of findings that affect happiness and stability in marriage (Hall, 2006). Olson and Olson (2000) identified ten categories that can predict strong marriages which are

communication, flexibility, closeness, personality issues, conflict resolution, sexual relationships, leisure activities, family and friends, financial management and spiritual beliefs. In a semi-structured interview conducted by McKenzie (2003) states that successful marriages are enlisted as follow: 1) treating each other as equals, 2) liking each other, 3) considers to be mature, 4) be as friends, 5) feels to be lucky, 6) use humor; 7) have strong self-concepts and are committed and 8) communication.

Hans (2000) believed that locus of control is an individual's perception of the underlying main causes of events in his/her life. It is the extent to which people believe that they influence events in their lives. The locus of control can be external or internal. People with an internal locus of control believe that they are primarily responsible for the outcomes in their lives. These people tend to be self-reliant and believe that nothing can hold them back except themselves.

Conceptual Framework of the research study (Happiness, locus of control and marital adjustment):

In this section, the concepts used in the study are being discussed under the following heads:

Happiness:

Happiness is an emotional feeling which an individual experiences in his life that ranges from contentment and satisfaction to bliss and intense joy. It is the essence of her spiritual experience, living every minute with love, grace and gratitude. Humanistic psychologists emphasized the positive effects of happiness. Psychologists like Maslow (1970) stated that happiness lies together with "joy" and "peak experiences", which accompanies growth towards "self-actualization". According to this view, happiness was described as both a result and an accelerator of growth.

In the words of Philosophers and Scientists, the term, 'happiness' has always been associated with the social analysis. An individual has always strived for leading a happier life, for better living and for increased well-being. Thus, happiness is interpreted and has definitions according to different philosophical traditions and the most recent varying theoretical perspectives of economists, psychologists and sociologists.

According to the sociological point of view, happiness was considered to be an essential aspect of subjective well-being (Bartram, 2011) which was somewhere

interpreted and understood in its social context (Illouz, 1997). Researchers such as Diener *et al.* (1997), Nuvolati (2002) and Veenhoven (1984, 2008) have focussed happiness as the positive evaluation which a single individual gives to his or her life to some aspects of his or her life. Alexandrova in 2008 stated that the evaluation of one's life was based upon two types of appraisals which represented two components of happiness. The first was affective, which refers to "the degree to which affective experience was dominated by pleasantness during a certain period" (Alexandrova, 2008). The second was cognitive (contentment), which has to be understood as "the degree to which an individual perceived his or her conscious aims to be achieved" (Alexandrova, 2008). In other words, it can be said that an individual goes through a process of feeling and thinking through which they judge their achievements according to their aspirations.

Marriage:

All the marriages have been aimed at happiness in one or another way. Most couples became married because they believed that marriage was one of the strongest medium for fulfilling their expectations. Some of the expectations would be realistic while others are unrealistic. This was due to the complex nature of marriage and each individual was as complex as a universe. Therefore, in marriage two universes come together.

According to Schneider (1960), "Marital adjustment means the ability to meet day to day demands and responsibilities of marriage with whatever degree of emotional stability and efficiency was required at the time. It involves getting along with and enjoying the companionship of the marital partner, participating in the interest and activities of the family group, accepting additional responsibilities as they arose and changing one's style of life to correspond with changes in the family life.

Spainer and Cole (1976), Ofeogbu (1998) and Ebebuwa-Okoh (2007) opined that the measure of marital adjustment does not generally assess a changing process. Rather, it measured a position on a continuum from well-adjusted to maladjusted. Therefore, when marital adjustment was achieved, troublesome marital differences were reduced. Inter-personal tensions and personal anxiety could be, then, well managed. This has increased marital satisfaction, happiness and dyadic cohesion.

Locus of control and happiness:

The term, “locus of control” was defined a personality construct referring to an individual’s perception of the locus of control of events as determined internally by his/her own behavior versus fate, luck or eternal circumstances (Grantz, 1999). It was described as a psychological construct which referred to whether individuals believe that their behavior or more correctly, the reinforcements from behavior were under their control.

Smolen and Spiegel (1987) suggested that internality modified the effects of spousal provocation for husbands, but not for wives. Ridley and Bain (1983) associated the willingness to be self-disclosing with the awareness that the relationship will benefit from the revelation, feeling skilled enough in communication and having a partner who was not only receptive but accepting. Belsky and Kelly (1994) claimed that for women aggressiveness was an expression of powerlessness when their husbands were “stonewalling.” They explained that women increased their attacks seeking a response. When the wife eventually received a reaction, a destructive cycle of escalation and counter-escalation began.

Previous Research:

In contemporary times, many pieces of researches and studies have been conducted in the field of marital adjustment in order to highlight various aspects some of them are mentioned here. Garima *et al.* (2014) found that working and non-working women did not differ from each other on marital adjustment as well as on psychological well-being but on a few dimensions of psychological wellbeing. Rinku (2013) revealed that non-working women face more marital adjustment problems in comparison to working women. German (2008) found that trust and marital satisfaction was significantly higher among women than men. Eng *et al.* (2005) examined the effect of the change in marital status on health behaviors among men. They found marital termination has adversely affect on health and dietary behaviors of men. Ng *et al.* (2009) investigated gender differences in marital and life satisfaction and the results revealed that women generally report lower marital quality than men. Kerkmann *et al.* (2000) found a positive relationship between finance and marital adjustment.

Gender has been a natural endowment qualifying an individual as either male or female. Osborne (1988) opined that females were social and emotional beings

who take initiative to cement their relationship while males (husbands) seem better equipped to do abstract thinking and lean toward being venturesome in marriage. These natural endowments affected the reactions of spouses in the expression of emotions, management of finance, communication flow and involvement in the place of work (environmental variables) which, in turn, affected their marital adjustment.

The marital adjustment was very important for working women because women status and reality in the authoritarian patriarchal society in India might further exacerbate life stressors, anxiety or depression (Mukhopadhyay and Dewani, 1976). Women who step out of socially described roles often experience stress, tension, hostility due to their multiple roles. In that case, where they were getting spouse support became very relaxing and it helped them to cope up with that job stress. In this case, the coping strategy played a very crucial role. Coping refers to the cognitive, behavioural and emotional ways of individuals by which they could manage stressful situations.

Research offered many results that were related to locus of control, specifically internal and external locus of control constructs. External locus of control was reported to be related with high psychological symptom levels (Lefcourt, 1976, Ormel and Schaufeli, 1991), poor coping with difficult events and situations (Ross, 1991) and lower states of well-being (Lefcourt, 1976). On the other hand, internal locus of control was reported as relevant to persist under difficulty, greater academic and occupational performance, thus, trying to prevent health problems, more satisfactory interpersonal relationships, better psychological adjustment (such as higher self-esteem, less anxiety, and less depression) and greater life satisfaction (Carton and Nowicki, 1994). Feingold (1994) reported that there was no consistent sex difference in locus of control.

Need for the study:

The research from western studies reported that there were several factors which affect the marital relationship and well-being among the couples. In consideration, better adjustment plays a significant role to avoid any conflicts between the couples. Happily married people may have greater levels of life satisfaction than others and marriage can really boost a person’s happiness or sense of subjective well-being. When a marriage is good, the benefits may be even greater,

including a sense of euphoria with life or a real sense of bliss. Thus, as the above research studies have suggested, it was presumed in the present study that exploration with regard to happiness in married couples would be fruitful. Furthermore, this study was an effort to explore the contribution of factors such as locus of control and marital adjustment in the dynamics of happiness amongst married couples. The above-documented study was affirmed in order to help the researcher to develop a thorough understanding and insight into previous work and the trends that have emerged to study the relationship of married couples. But insufficient researches evidences make it pertinent to study the gender differences in Indian context with reference to locus of control and marital adjustment. Therefore, this study focused on gender differences and perception of locus of control and marital adjustment among married couples.

Objectives:

- To assess the level of happiness among married couples (aged 26-35 years)
- To examine the gender differences with respect to locus of control as a psychological factor among married couples
- To explore gender differences with respect to the contribution of marital adjustment as a contextual factor among married couples

Hypothesis to be tested:

- H1: Husbands will have higher happiness levels as compared to their wives
- H2: Wives will be more on internal control as compared to their husbands
- H3: Husbands will have higher powerful others control as compared to their wives
- H4: Wives will have higher chance control as compared to their husbands
- H5: Wives will have higher adjustment levels with respect to their marriage as compared to their husbands

METHODOLOGY

The present study was undertaken to examine the locus of control and marital adjustment as predictors of happiness among married couples belonging to Chandigarh City. A systematic procedure was designed for conducting the investigation, analysis and interpretation of the data. The sample for the present study was drawn from various households located in the urban areas of

Chandigarh city. The sample size comprised of 100 married couples (N=200) in the age range of 26-35 years, living in Chandigarh city. The sample was divided to have an equal number of husbands (n1=100) and wives (n2=100). In each selected household, the investigator approached married couples and sought their help to prepare a list of married couples fulfilling the following criteria:

- Married couples living together
- Married couples in the age range of 26-35 years
- Belonging to Chandigarh city

Tools/Measures:

- Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle, 2001). This questionnaire was administered to assess the perception of happiness among adolescents. It is a 29 item questionnaire measuring the main components of happiness *i.e.* achievement and satisfaction, enjoyment, vigour and health. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.90.

- Levenson's Multidimensional Locus of Control Scales (1974). The three sub-scales were used to assess the predictability of well-being from measures of control. Respondents selected their responses to each item from a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The reliability for each subscales was 0.64 for the Powerful Others dimension, 0.77 for the Internal Control dimension and 0.78 for the Chance Control dimension. The split-half-reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.62, 0.66 and 0.64, respectively.

- Marital Adjustment Questionnaire developed by Dr. Pramod Kumar and Dr. Kanchana Rohatgi in 1999 was used to assess the perception of marital adjustment among married couples. The marital adjustment questionnaire (MAQ) comprised of 25 'Yes/No' items. The areas have been divided into three main broad categories like: Sexual, Social and Emotional. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.71 and validity was 0.84.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to assess the level of happiness, the locus of control and marital adjustment as predictors of happiness among married couples. The study also sought to examine whether factors like locus of control and marital adjustment were affecting the happiness levels of the married couples and to determine whether the happiness level of the couples was correlated

to these variables.

Happiness profile of married couples:

Table 1 reveals the distribution of the sample across different levels of happiness as perceived by married couples. In the total sample, a major proportion (35.5%) of married couples reported happiness at a high level followed by 33 per cent who perceived a low level of happiness. Only 31.5 per cent of the total sample recorded an average level of happiness. The previous research findings by Hawkins and Booth in 2005 found that the spouses who were continuously married and who reported a mean or higher level of marital happiness had greater individual well-being over time than did continuously unhappily married respondents, even after taking into account initial levels of marital happiness. Argyle (1999) in his research documented that married persons reported greater subjective well-being than persons who have never been married or have been divorced, separated or widowed. The two reasons have been evident that why marriage contributed to well-being were emphasized (Argyle, 1999), which stated that firstly, marriage provides additional sources of self-esteem, for instance, by providing an escape from stress in other parts of one's life, in particular, one's job. It was advantageous for one's personal identity to have more than one leg to stand on. Secondly, married people had a better chance of benefiting from a lasting and supportive intimate relationship and suffered less from loneliness.

The majority of husbands (38%), as well as wives (33%), reported happiness at high levels. 37 per cent of wives and 29 per cent of husbands reported happiness at low levels whereas 33 per cent of husbands and 30 per cent wives perceived happiness scores at average levels in this category. Chi-square value depicted gender

differences to be non-significant as far as the distribution of both genders across different levels of happiness as perceived by the couples was concerned. Though gender differences in the distribution of gender were non-significant, yet a high percentage of husbands (38%) perceived a high level of happiness as compared to wives (33%).

Table 2 presents gender differences in the mean scores of happiness as perceived by married couples. It revealed that the husbands (mean scores=133.02) perceived more happiness as compared to wives (mean scores= 126.92). Several studies have revealed significant differences in happiness scores between husbands and wives. The results were in line with the findings by Carstensen *et al.* (1995) which documented that wives were more effectively negative than husbands, whereas husbands were more defensive than wives and unhappy marriages involved the greater exchange of negative affect than happy marriages. The findings of the study were contrary to the earlier research studies which concluded statistically no gender differences in married couples. Other findings by Osborne (1988) opined that wives were social and emotional beings to take initiative to cement their relationship while husbands seemed to be better equipped to do abstract thinking and lean towards being venturesome in marriage. The findings documented by Argyle (1999) reported that married women and married men reported similar levels of subjective well-being, which means that marriage does not benefit one gender more than the other. T-value revealed gender differences to be non-significant. It was hypothesized in the present study that husbands would perceive higher happiness levels as compared to their wives. Hence, according to the findings, the hypothesis was proved to be accepted.

Table 1 : Distribution of the sample as per the level of happiness perceived by married couples

Happiness Scores	Total (N=200)		Husbands(n ₁ =100)		Wives (n ₂ =100)		Chi- square value	p- value
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Low	66	33	29	29.0	37	37.0	1.465	0.481
Average	63	31.5	33	33.0	30	30		
High	71	35.5	38	38.0	33	33		

Total Sample (N) = 200; Husbands (n₁) = 100; Wives (n₂) = 100

Table 2 : Gender differences in perception of happiness (Mean ± SD) by married couples

Variable	Husbands n ₁ =100		Wives n ₂ =100		t- value	p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Happiness	133.02	22.52	126.92	20.74	1.993	0.048

Total Sample (N) = 200; Husbands (n₁) = 100; Wives (n₂) = 100

Gender differences in perception of locus of control (Mean SD) by couples:

Table 3 gives the gender differences in mean scores in the perception of locus of control among married couples. Findings revealed to be significant ($p < 0.01$) for chance scale only and non-significant for internal scale and powerful others. According to the results, wives perceived slightly higher internal control (Mean=38.95) as compared to their husbands (Mean=38.42) followed by powerful others scale which recorded that husbands (Mean=31.40) to have higher control as compared to their wives (Mean=29.87). The results on chance scale depicted that wives (Mean=32.16) to be higher on this dimension as compared to their husbands (Mean=29.52). It means that wives had an influence of fate in their roles being performed in a marital relationship as compared to their husbands.

The findings of the studies were not harmonious with the previous researches conducted which documented that there were no gender differences among husbands and wives. The study by Madden and Janoff-Bulman (1981) indicated that the most satisfied wives were those who do not blame their husbands and who feel they have control over the negative marital events. Wives blaming their husbands believed that their husbands have the power to control the occurrence and recurrence of the conflicts. As a result of blaming their husbands, women in this group regarded the problems as relatively irresolvable and the marriage as unsatisfying. The contradictory research study by Smolen and Spiegel (1987) suggested that internality modified the effects of spousal provocation for husbands, but not for wives. Therefore, the research findings by Smolen and Spiegel were in favour of the present study that wives reported

having higher internal control as compared to their husbands. It was hypothesized in the present study that wives would have higher internal control as compared to their husbands. Hence, according to the findings, the hypothesis certified to be accepted. It was also hypothesized that husbands would perceive higher powerful control as compared to their wives. Therefore, the hypothesis proved to be accepted. The final hypothesis in this category, that wife would have higher chance control as compared to their husbands proved to be again accepted, as far as the results of the present study were concerned.

Gender differences in perception of marital adjustment (Mean \pm SD) by couples:

Table 4 gives the gender differences in mean scores in the perception of marital adjustment by married couples. Findings revealed to be significant ($p < 0.01$). According to the results, wives (Mean=22.40) reported significantly higher marital adjustment as compared to husbands (Mean=20.32). The findings of the present study were contrary to the results reported by Rao in 2017 and Jamir (2016) which recorded no significant mean differences on marital adjustment between husbands and wives. The coeval research has supported the present research by Taisri and Joseph (2013) which revealed that wives perceived better marital adjustment and independence than their husbands. Therefore, the present study was in line with the previous research findings by Taisri and Joseph in 2013 which reported wives to be well-adjusted as compared to their husbands. It was hypothesized in the present study that wives would have a higher adjustment with respect to marriage as compared to husbands. Hence, according to the findings,

Table 3 : Gender differences in perception of locus of control (Mean \pm SD) by married couples

Variable	Husbands ($n_1=100$)		Wives ($n_2=100$)		t-value	p-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Locus of Control						
Internal Control	38.42	9.09	38.95	7.33	0.454	0.650
Powerful Others Control	31.40	60.33	29.87	6.48	1.689	0.093
Chance Control	29.52	6.92	32.16	6.33	2.814	0.005**

$p < 0.01$ **; Total Sample (N) = 200; Husbands (n_1) = 100; Wives (n_2) = 100

Table 4 : Gender differences in perception of marital adjustment (Mean \pm SD) by married couples

Variable	Husbands $n_1=100$		Wives $n_2=100$		t-value	p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Marital Adjustment	20.32	2.25	22.40	1.60	7.538	0.0001**

$p < 0.01$ ** Total Sample (N) = 200; Husbands (n_1) = 100; Wives (n_2) = 100

the hypothesis was proved to be accepted.

Salient findings:

1. The majority of the married couples (52.5%) in this data were in the age group of 31-35 years. 47.5 per cent were between 26-30 years of age.

2. In the total sample, a major proportion (35.5%) of married couples reported happiness at a high level followed by 33 per cent who perceived a low level of happiness. Only 31.5 per cent of the total sample recorded an average level of happiness.

3. The husbands perceived more happiness as compared to wives. It was hypothesized in the present study that husbands would perceive higher happiness levels as compared to their wives. Hence, according to the findings, the hypothesis was proved to be accepted.

4. Majority of the married couples (49%) perceived average levels of adjustment in their relationship whereas 25 per cent perceived a low level of marital adjustment.

5. Gender differences were significant at 5% level of significance in the distribution of husbands and wives across different levels of marital adjustment.

6. Wives reported significantly higher marital adjustment as compared to husbands. It was hypothesized in the present study that wives would have a higher adjustment with respect to marriage as compared to husbands. Hence, according to the findings, the hypothesis was proved to be accepted.

7. Though gender differences were found to be non-significant, yet, wives perceived an internal locus of control more than their husbands. However, gender differences revealed contrary findings as far as the dimension of powerful others control was concerned as husbands perceived this scale to be higher than their wives. It was hypothesized in the present study that wives would have higher internal control as compared to their husbands. It was also hypothesized that husbands would perceive higher powerful control as compared to females. Hence, according to the findings, the hypothesis proved to be accepted. The final hypothesis, that wives would have more influence on the vulnerability and may need more support from their partner proved to be again accepted, as per the results of the present study were concerned.

8. Significant gender differences were observed in the scale of chance control. The significant differences documented wives to perceive higher chance control than their husbands.

Conclusion:

It can be concluded that husbands perceived more happiness as compared to wives. Majority of the married couples perceived average levels of adjustment in their relationship. Wives reported significantly higher marital adjustment as compared to husbands as far as gender differences were concerned.

Implications of the study :

– The findings of the study would be useful for psychologists, counselors, social workers, policy makers, educationists and researchers for a holistic understanding of happiness.

– The results can provide empirical feedback to the professionals and NGOs to plan and organize intervention strategies and programs to promote happiness among married couples and couples who are in their courtship period.

– The results can be used to improve upon those factors and situations which emerge as risk factors for happiness and to develop and sustain those which act as protective ones to enhance the level of happiness among married couples.

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