

Marriage Attitudes among Unmarried Young Adults: The Influence of Self-Perception and Societal Pressure

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ABSTRACT: The aim of the present study was to explore the relationship between societal pressure, self-perception, and attitudes toward marriage among unmarried young adults. It also examined gender differences in attitudes toward marriage and the significance of self-perception and perceived societal pressure in predicting attitudes toward marriage. The study hypothesized that, first, self-perception would be significantly associated with attitudes toward marriage; second, perceived societal pressure would be significantly associated with attitudes toward marriage; third, self-perception would be significantly associated with perceived societal pressure; and fourth, male and female unmarried young adults would differ significantly in self-perception, perceived societal pressure, and attitudes toward marriage. A quantitative correlational research design was used. The sample comprised 226 unmarried young adults (93 males and 133 females), aged 20–35 years, from Karachi, Pakistan. Purposive sampling was used to collect the data. Participants completed a demographic form and three standardized instruments: the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS), and Marital Attitude Scale (MAS). Data were collected through online and face-to-face surveys after informed consent. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between self-perception and attitudes toward marriage, while no significant correlation was found between perceived societal pressure and attitudes toward marriage. A very small positive correlation was observed between self-perception and perceived societal pressure. Independent-samples t-tests showed no significant gender differences in self-perception, perceived societal pressure, or attitudes toward marriage. The findings indicate that internal psychological factors have a greater influence than external social factors on marriage attitudes among unmarried young adults.

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Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important aspects in life and is regarded in all cultures as a major developmental stage. It offers people emotional support, companionship, social support, economic stability and the chance to form

families. In addition to its significance to individuals, marriage has a social value by reinforcing family systems and leading to psychological and physical health. While marriage is a universal concept, it is interpreted differently in different cultures, from the perspective of social norms, religious beliefs, traditions, and the economic situation. In collectivistic societies, marriage is not only a relationship between two people, but is also a relationship between two families; family honour, cultural norms and societal norms play a very dominant role in marriage selection (Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 1977).

In Pakistan, marriage is considered an important life event that marks adulthood, maturity and social responsibility. For most youth, the right time for marriage is socially determined, and postponing marriage is likely to receive negative comments from family and society. In contrast to other Western societies where marriage is becoming an individual option, Pakistani culture is very iterative about the decision of marriage made by a group of people involved in the decision-making process: family approval, caste, socioeconomic status, religious compatibility, etc. Therefore, unmarried people often feel explicit and implicit pressure from their parents, relatives, and community to marry (Zhang & Kline, 2009; Bejanyan et al., 2015). These attitudes can affect people's attitudes towards marriage and their desire to marry.

Attitudes towards marriage are defined as positive, negative or ambivalent evaluations, beliefs and emotional reactions of an individual in relation to marriage (Braaten & Rosén, 1998). These attitudes are formed from personal experiences, family environment, cultural values, educational experiences, religious beliefs, and observations of marital relationships in society. Generally, positive marital attitudes are linked to seeing marriage as a source of companionship, emotional security and personal fulfillment, while negative attitudes tend to be related to worries about marital conflict, economic uncertainty, loss of independence, gender differences, or the possibility of poor relationships. Given that attitudes influence behavioural intentions, it is important to understand factors that influence marital attitudes, and this is a growing concern for psychologists, family researchers, and policy makers (Ajzen, 1991).

The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) gives an appropriate framework to understand attitudes towards marriage. This theory is based on three main determinants of behavioral intentions: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In terms of marriage, people are more likely to plan to marry if they have positive attitudes about marriage, feel that significant others approve of their marriage, and feel that they have adequate resources and readiness for marriage. Hence, marriage decisions are a result of mental state and social factors.

Likewise, Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory proposes that people learn beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors from other people in their social surroundings. Children and young adults are constantly witnessing relationships between parents, relatives, peers and media images of marriage. Positive observations can promote positive marital attitudes, while negative observations, such as marital conflict, divorce, domestic violence, or marital dissatisfaction, can promote negative marital attitudes. Thus, marital attitudes are constantly formed in the process of learning in the family and society.

Societal pressure has been a topic of much discussion among the external factors affecting marital attitudes. Societal pressure is the pressure that comes from outside of oneself that encourages people to conform to socially accepted norms, traditions, and cultural standards (American Psychological Association [APA], 2018). In Pakistani society, marriage is often seen as a duty, not just a decision. People in their late teens and early twenties are frequently asked the same questions, put under pressure to marry, compared to others, and expected to have a family. These pressures can turn into psychological stressors that affect self-confidence, decision-making, and marriage perceptions (Zhang & Kline, 2009).

The impact of societal pressure on the attitudes of individuals towards marriage has been shown in previous studies. Ercan and Uçar (2021) found that family expectations, traditional gender roles and social norms significantly influence attitudes towards marriage among young adults. Their findings indicated that societal expectations are not the only factors that affect marital decisions, but rather psychological factors play a role as well. Similarly, Mrozowicz-Wrońska et al. (2023) reported that unmarried men often felt emotionally distressed due to the continued societal pressure to marry. The social comparisons and traditional masculine expectations had a negative impact on perceptions of marriage and long-term relationships, as reported by participants. Likewise, Sharp and Ganong (2011) noted that single women tend to be subject to overt and covert pressures from society, such as constant reminders to marry, and the sense of disappointment from family members when they do not marry. These experiences are a source of emotional distress and shape women's views of marriage.

Besides external factors, internal psychological factors also play an important role in marital attitudes. Self-perception is a person's beliefs, evaluations, feelings, and understanding about personal identity, abilities, values, and characteristics (American Psychological Association, 2023). People with a high level of self-concept clarity tend to be more confident, emotionally stable, and independent in making significant life choices. On the other hand, people who are uncertain about their identity might be more dependent on external validation and acceptance when deciding about relationships and marriage.

Campbell et al. (1996) defined self-concept clarity as the degree to which self-beliefs are clear, internally consistent, and consistent over time. People with high self-concept clarity tend to make decisions according to their own values, not the expectations of others. Self-perception has been shown to affect relationship expectations, partner preferences, and the desire to marry in previous research. Hagemeyer et al. (2013) found that people's self-evaluations influence their mate preferences and relationship expectations via social comparison processes. Likewise, Malik et al. (2023) discovered that women's self-perceived physical attractiveness and beauty standards impact their experiences of the marriage proposal process in Pakistan, underscoring the significance of self-perception in marital decision-making.

More recent research has also shown that attitudes towards marriage are shaped by a number of psychological and social factors that interact with one another. Eastwick and Hunk (2014) found that men tended to have more positive attitudes toward marriage, while women tended to have more negative attitudes toward marriage and egalitarian views. In South Korea, Cha (2019) reported that raising awareness about gender equality and decreasing hostility toward traditional gender differentiation led to more positive marital attitudes among unmarried people. Similarly, Campos et al. (2016) found that the perceived importance of marriage varied significantly by country as a function of the gender role attitudes and gender equality of the country.

Qualitative studies have also given some insights into the experiences of marriage within Pakistan. Saeed and Zainab (2017) discovered that many unmarried Pakistani females preferred to stay unmarried due to fear of loss of independence, incompatibility and limited autonomy after marriage. Participants also reported that constant criticism and social pressure from the family were significant psychological problems. Likewise, Sultana et al. (2021) found that Pakistani society has a strong connection between womanhood and marriage and motherhood, which leads to discrimination, loneliness, shame, and exclusion among unmarried women. Fatima and Shahid (2025) also found financial needs, family expectations, caste issues, educational disparities, and physical looks to be significant factors for delayed marriage in Pakistan.

There is also some research that indicates family functioning is a factor in marriage-related attitudes. Hussain and Hayee (2024) found that positive attitudes towards marriage and self-regulation were linked to healthy family functioning in the context of Pakistani young adults. The marital attitudes of men and of people who lived in joint family systems were more positive than those of women and people who lived in nuclear family systems. The results

of this study suggest that family environment, psychological functioning and social expectations are interrelated and have an impact on marriage-related attitudes.

While the impact of societal pressure, self-perception and marital attitudes has been studied separately, there is a lack of quantitative studies exploring the combined effect of these factors on unmarried Pakistani young adults. Much of the literature that has been written has been on gender roles, mate preferences, late marriage, or qualitative experiences of the unmarried. Thus, empirical evidence on the interaction between internal psychological factors and external social factors to shape attitudes towards marriage is still scarce, especially in the Pakistani context.

The present study aims to fill this gap by exploring the relationship between self-perception, perceived societal pressure and attitude towards marriage among the unmarried young adults of Karachi, Pakistan. In addition, it examines the difference between males and females on these psychological factors. Knowing these relationships could help psychologists, counselors, educators, and policymakers create interventions that help people make decisions in their marriages that are psychologically appropriate and minimize unnecessary social pressure. The results will also be used to add to the existing literature on marriage psychology in collectivistic societies and to support future studies on psychosocial factors affecting marital attitudes.

Objectives

The study aimed to:

1. Examine the relationship between self-perception and attitudes toward marriage.
2. Examine the relationship between societal pressure and attitudes toward marriage.
3. Determine the relationship between societal pressure and self-perception.
4. Compare male and female unmarried individuals regarding their attitudes toward marriage.

Research Questions

1. Does self-perception influence attitudes toward marriage among unmarried young adults?
2. Is societal pressure associated with attitudes toward marriage?
3. Is societal pressure associated with self-perception?
4. Do unmarried males and females differ in their attitudes toward marriage?

Hypothesis

- H¹: Self-perception will be significantly associated with attitudes toward marriage among unmarried young adults.
- H²: Perceived societal pressure will be significantly associated with attitudes toward marriage among unmarried young adults.
- H³: Self-perception will be significantly associated with perceived societal pressure among unmarried young adults.
- H⁴: Male and female unmarried young adults will significantly differ in their levels of self-perception, perceived societal pressure, and attitudes toward marriage.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study used a quantitative correlational research design to investigate the relationship between perceived societal pressure, self-perception, and attitudes towards marriage among unmarried young adults.

Sample

The sample comprised 226 unmarried young adults (93 male and 133 female) aged between 20 and 35 years who were living in the city of Karachi, Pakistan. The sampling technique used in this study was a purposive sampling technique based on the eligibility criteria of the study.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study comprised unmarried males and females aged 20 to 35 years, residing in Karachi and who willingly participated in the study. Those who were separated, married, divorced, widowed, under 20 years old, over 35 years old, or who did not complete the questionnaires were not included in the study.

Measures

Demographic Form: The background information of the participants was obtained using a self-developed demographic information form, which included the following information: age, gender, education, occupation, relationship status, family system and other information relevant to the study.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS, Zimet et al., 1988): The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988) was used to measure perceived societal pressure. The instrument measures the extent to which people feel expectations, influence and pressure from family members, relatives, peers and society regarding marriage. Responses were given on a Likert-type rating scale, with higher scores representing higher perceived societal pressure in relation to marriage. In the present study, the scale had good internal consistency, meaning that it was a reliable measure of participants' perception of societal pressure.

Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS; Campbell et al., 1996): The Self-Concept Clarity Scale (SCCS) of Campbell et al. (1996) was used to assess self-perception. The SCCS is a popular self-report measure with 12 items designed to measure the degree to which people have a clear, internally consistent, and stable sense of self. Each statement was rated on a five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) by the participants. The total score was computed after several items were reverse-scored. Higher scores indicated higher self-concept clarity and more positive and stable self-perception. The psychometric properties of the SCCS have been reported to be good in previous studies, and the scale showed good internal consistency in the present study.

The Marital Attitude Scale (MAS; Braaten & Rosén, 1998): The Marital Attitude Scale (MAS) of Braaten and Rosén (1998) was used to measure attitudes towards marriage. The MAS is composed of 23 items that assess people's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral attitudes about marriage. Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree to the statements. The scale is designed to assess the positive or negative attitude towards marriage; the higher the total score, the more positive the attitude towards marriage. In the present study, the Marital Attitude Scale showed acceptable reliability and was found to be a suitable instrument to measure attitudes towards marriage among unmarried Pakistani young adults.

Procedure

The participants were selected using purposive sampling, both online and face-to-face. Participants were given an explanation of the purpose of the study, informed of confidentiality and anonymity, and gave informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire package included the demographic form and the study

measures, and took about 10-15 minutes to complete. Questionnaires that were completed were screened, coded and entered into IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26 for analysis.

Statistical Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26 was used to analyze the data. Participants' characteristics and study variables were summarized using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations). The internal consistency of the instruments was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to explore the relationships between the study variables, and independent-samples t-tests were used to explore gender differences. The .05 level was used to determine statistical significance.

Results

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=226)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age Group			
	Younger Adults	226	100
Gender			
	Male	93	41.2
	Female	133	58.8
Relationship Status			
	Single	134	59.3
	Engaged	29	12.8
	Committed Relationship	63	27.9
Education			
	Intermediate	58	25.7
	Bachelor's	125	55.3
	Master's	43	19.0
Occupation			
	Unemployed	13	5.8
	Employed	94	41.6
	Student	119	52.7

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Study Variables (N=226)

Variable	Items	α
Societal Pressure	13	.76
Self-Perception	12	.84
Attitude Towards Marriage	23	.73

Table 3

Pearson Correlation Matrix of Study Variables (N=226)

Variables	1	2	3
Self-Perception	-		
Societal Pressure	.13*	-	
Attitude Towards Marriage	-.32**	-.10	-

Note. $p < .05^*$, $**p < .001$.

Table 3 results showed that there was a significant negative correlation between self-perception and attitudes toward marriage ($r = -.32$, $p < .001$), which means that the higher the level of self-perception, the less positive attitudes toward marriage. There was no significant correlation between perceived societal pressure and attitudes toward marriage ($r = -.10$, $p > .05$). A weak, but statistically significant positive correlation was obtained between self-perception and societal pressure ($r = .13$, $p < .05$).

Table 4

Independent-Samples t-Test for Gender Differences (N = 226)

Variable	Male (SD)	Female (SD)	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Attitudes toward Marriage	73.11 (11.90)	72.53 (10.24)	0.39	226	.70	.05
Societal Pressure	57.05 (13.26)	59.14 (15.51)	-1.05	226	.29	-.14
Self-Perception	36.34 (9.32)	36.99 (9.35)	-0.51	226	.61	-.07

There were no statistically significant gender differences in any of the study variables as shown in Table 4. Males' attitudes toward marriage were slightly higher than females', while the females' attitudes toward societal pressure and self-perception were marginally higher than the males'.

Discussion

The present study explored the association between self-perception, perceived societal pressure and attitudes towards marriage among unmarried young adults in Karachi, Pakistan. The results indicated that self-perception was significantly correlated with attitudes towards marriage, while perceived societal pressure was not significantly correlated with attitudes towards marriage. There was also a weak positive correlation between self-perception and societal pressure, and no significant gender differences were revealed. The first hypothesis was confirmed, which suggests that people with higher self-concept clarity develop attitudes towards marriage based on their personal values and life plans, not on social expectations. This result aligns with Campbell et al. (1996) and Hagemeyer et al. (2013), who found that self-perception affects relationship expectations and significant life choices. In Pakistan, educated young adults might be more inclined to focus on education, career advancement, and personal preparedness over marriage. The second hypothesis was not supported, meaning that marriage is a valued institution in Pakistani society but perceived societal pressure does not necessarily affect people's attitudes toward marriage. This is a different result from Ercan and Uçar (2021) and Sharp and Ganong (2011), which may be due to evolving social values and increased autonomy in the lives of educated urban youth. The third hypothesis was confirmed, showing a weak positive correlation between self-perception and social pressure. This indicates that social expectations could lead people to consider their own preparedness and future plans, as per the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The fourth hypothesis was rejected because there was no significant difference between the genders. This could suggest that urbanization in Pakistan has led to a decrease in the traditional gender disparity in attitudes towards marriage. In conclusion, the results indicated that self-perception is more influential than societal pressure in determining marriage attitudes among unmarried young adults, reflecting the increasing importance of personal values and individual choices in today's society in Pakistan.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicated that self-perception is significantly related to attitudes toward marriage among the unmarried young adults, while perceived societal pressure is not significantly related to attitudes toward marriage. There was a weak positive correlation between self-perception and societal pressure, while there were no

gender differences. The results indicate that personal psychological factors have greater influence than external social pressure on marriage attitudes of educated young adults in Pakistan.

Limitations and Recommendations

The study was correlational in design, used purposive sampling, and the data were collected from one metropolitan city, which may restrict the generalizability of the results. Self-report measures may also have resulted in response bias. Larger and more diverse samples from various parts of Pakistan, longitudinal or mixed-method designs, and other variables like family functioning, socioeconomic status, religiosity, and personality should be included in future studies to gain a better understanding of attitudes towards marriage.

Implications

The results highlight the role of self-perception in the process of decision-making in marriage. The study can help psychologists, counselors and educators to create premarital counseling and psychoeducational programs to enhance self-awareness and informed decision-making. The results also add to the scarce literature on marriage attitudes in Pakistan and serve as a basis for further research in collectivistic cultural contexts.

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