

Psychological Distress and Life Satisfaction: A Cross-sectional Study of Working versus Non-working, Married and Unmarried Women in Today's Challenging Times

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ABSTRACT

During early 2020, every being on this earth was in some way or the other affected by the deadly coronavirus. One section of the society which was burdened the most was the women. The present paper focuses on the psychological distress and life satisfaction among working and non-working married/unmarried women. A sample of 160 women (80 working women and 80 non-working women) belonging to an age range of 25–50 years was selected. Both groups consisted of 40 married and 40 unmarried women. "The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)" by Kessler and Mroczek (1992) and "Satisfaction with Life Scale" by Diener *et al.* (1985) were administered to assess Psychological distress and life satisfaction. Findings showed that there was a significant difference in the psychological distress and life satisfaction between married and unmarried women. No significant interaction effect was observed between marital status and employability, while a significant interaction effect of marital status and employability on life satisfaction was found. The results clearly implicate that there is an urgent need for everyone to be sensitive to the overall well-being of women, who are the backbone of family, society, and country at large.

Keywords: COVID-19, Life satisfaction, Married and unmarried women, Psychological distress, Working versus non-working
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INTRODUCTION

The years 2020 and 2021 had proven to be disastrous. The COVID-19 pandemic inflicted havoc around the globe; brought the world to a standstill, and a drastic change in the cultural ethos and economy. The pandemic and the lockdown deteriorated the quality of life mentally, physically, socially, economically, and altered peoples' outlook of life. The novel approach of working from home, temporary unemployment, children's online education, and the loss of meeting and socializing other family members, friends, and colleagues changed everyone psychologically. However, this impact has not been the same across all social groups, with the most vulnerable and marginalized groups being affected differently due to existing social inequalities (Grown and Paramo, 2020). In particular, the lockdown has broadened current gender inequalities and limited women's opportunities (United Nations, 2020).^[1-4]

Psychological distress and life satisfaction are integral components of individual well-being, particularly among women who often juggle multiple roles and responsibilities in modern society. The intersection of work status (working or non-working) and marital status (married or unmarried) can significantly influence psychological well-being. Understanding the nuances of how these factors interplay became crucial for developing targeted interventions to enhance women's overall well-being.

Women experience unique stressors related to their roles in society, including societal expectations, familial responsibilities, and career aspirations. The decision to engage in paid employment or to focus on domestic duties can impact their sense of fulfillment and happiness. In addition, marital status can further shape their experiences, with married women potentially facing different stressors and sources of support compared to unmarried women. Psychological distress encompasses a range of negative emotional states, including anxiety, depression, and general dissatisfaction with life.^[6-8] On the other hand, life satisfaction reflects an

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individual's overall appraisal of the quality of their life. Michel *et al.* (2011) opined that family involvement with other family role-stressors is predictors of family-to-work conflict. They further reported that there is a mediating role of family to work conflict on work outcomes of job performance and withdrawal behavior. They also proposed that there was less evidence of the relationship between family involvement and family interfering with work.

Furthermore, stress is one's response to events that disrupt, or threaten to disrupt, our physical or psychological functioning (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Stress causes problems and strains the lives of living organisms as they try to cope up with and adapt to changing environmental conditions (Selye, 1956). Stress may occur not only in negative circumstances, but also in positive situations. Both kinds of stress have its consequences on a person's energy and capacity to cope, but bad stress (distress) generally causes more damage. Decker (1997) conceptualized psychological distress as a lack of motivation, sleep difficulties, feeling downhearted or blue, feeling hopeless about the future, feeling emotionally bored, or losing interest in suicidal things and thoughts (Weaver, 1995). Further psychological distress is characterized as an emotional disturbance that may impact on the social functioning and day-to-day living of individuals (Wheaton,

2007). It is evident that due to role expectations, women receive less social and economic support and face higher emotional requirements, role overload, and contradictory expectations than men. These lower gratifications and higher stresses have been associated with psychological distress.^[9-11]

Diener (1985) describes life satisfaction as an "optimistic, global evaluation of an individual's life." Life satisfaction is linked with a person's quality of life as a whole and is an important component of women's well-being. Life satisfaction is something more than merely deriving pleasure; it is wider in nature. It is about assessment of our lives and how happy and contented we are with the way things are happening. Recent years have seen a change in the role of women, where the demands of the family and society alone are no longer being met. To make her life stable in her dual role, women employees face a lot of challenges. Life satisfaction surveys typically show higher levels of satisfaction and happiness among workers than among unemployed people (Dolan *et al.*, 2008).

Nathawat and Mishra (2019) analyzed the level of self-esteem and life satisfaction among working women and homemakers. Rosenberg's self-esteem and life-size satisfaction Scale was administered on 60 women between 25 and 35 years old. Findings indicated that working women scored higher self-esteem and satisfaction with life than homemakers. Zakaria *et al.* (2018) in a study on "Marital status, career and income as indicators of life satisfaction among 410 middle-aged career females in Hulu Langat, Selangor, Malaysia," found that the degree of life satisfaction depends on marital status, career, and income. Baslevent and Kirmangolu (2017) examined gender inequality in Europe and the life satisfaction of working and non-working women. The findings showed that the well-being of working women is higher than that of housewives in countries where there is a smaller gender disparity, where women are better positioned in terms of equality with men in the public domain. Persistent gender stereotypes have been perceived by researchers as having a greater effect on the well-being of working women. Shukla *et al.* (2017) conducted a study to measure the stress levels of 50 working and 50 non-working women. The findings showed that working women had higher stress levels than non-working women.

Related to stress, Kermane's (2016) research assessed the level of stress among working women and housewives and their management through Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Breathing with Mindfulness techniques. The findings showed that the level of stress among the females working was high relative to housewives. Another study on depression and life satisfaction among working and unemployed married women in Turkey indicated that there is a statistically relevant association between depression and satisfaction with life, and there is a negative connection between depression and satisfaction with life (Alp *et al.*, 2016). Padhy *et al.* (2014) examined the mental health status and its correlates among married women residing in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India. A cross-sectional analysis performed on a group of 240 working women married showed 32.9% of women had poor mental health, and 10% of these women had some form of clinical assistance. Through logistic regression study, three predictors showed an important positive effect on the mental health status of married working women, such as the favorable attitude of coworkers, discussing their own issues with partners, and spending time on yoga/meditation/exercise. The study on "Anticipating Quality of Life of Working Women and Housewives Based on Power Structure,

Collaboration and Family Functions" showed that family functions, collaboration, and power structure are significantly related to anticipate quality of life. It was argued that the structure of power and family roles are effective variables on lifestyles and that the work of women contributes greatly to the psychological condition of families (Sadeghifard *et al.*, 2013). Another study showed that mental health and depression vary substantially for both working and non-working women (Dudhatra and Jogsan, 2012). The prevalence of psychological distress and depressive symptoms among married working women was investigated by Marhani *et al.* (2011), and the frequency of psychological distress and depressive symptoms was found to be 22.8% and 5.5%, respectively. Preventive measures such as progressive relaxation therapy, yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises were found to be effective in making women feel comfortable and centered in their lives. With the objective to study life satisfaction and self-esteem in married and unmarried women, Hasnain *et al.* (2011) found that working women reported substantially higher life satisfaction and lower self-esteem than for non-working women. However, both life satisfaction and self-esteem were found to be non-significant variations between married and unmarried women. By examining these variables across different groups, an insights into the unique challenges and sources of well-being experienced by women in various life circumstances can be examined.^[12-14]

Justification of the Problem

The Indian women (working or non-working) have been inflicted in a very big way post the deadly coronavirus (COVID-19), which had struck and shaken the whole wide world in 2020. Their caregiving responsibilities curve saw a sharp slope, which was due to a number of factors mainly cultural, social, and economic. The new responsibilities, in addition to the ongoing domestic crises, may have hampered the mental health of women. Suddenly, women were going an extra mile to furnish the well-being of their respective families. With this backdrop, the researchers became inquisitive to compare the psychological distress and life satisfaction of working and non-working married/unmarried women.^[15-18]

Aim

The aim is to compare the psychological distress and life satisfaction among working and non-working married/unmarried women.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the psychological distress between working and non-working women
2. To study the psychological distress between married and unmarried women
3. To study the interactional effect of employability and marital status on psychological distress
4. To study the life satisfaction between working and non-working women
5. To study the life satisfaction between married and unmarried women
6. To study the interaction effect of employability and marital status on life satisfaction.

Hypotheses

1. There would be no significant difference in psychological distress between working and non-working women
2. There would be no significant difference in psychological distress between married and unmarried women
3. There would be no significant interaction effect of employability and marital status on psychological distress
4. There would be no significant difference in life satisfaction between working and non-working women
5. There would be no significant difference in life satisfaction between married and unmarried women
6. There would be no significant interaction effect of employability and marital status on life satisfaction.^[19,20]

Operational Definitions of the Terms Used

1. Psychological distress: Psychological distress is a set of painful mental and physical symptoms that are associated with normal fluctuations of mood in most people
2. Life satisfaction: Life Satisfaction can be defined as the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as a whole
3. Working: The textbook definition of the word "working" is "having paid employment" and "functioning or able to function."

Variables

1. Independent variables
 - Employability: working vs. non-working
 - Marital Status: Married and Unmarried
2. Dependent variables
 - Psychological distress
 - Life satisfaction
3. Relevant variables
 - Educational Qualification – at least graduates were selected for the sample
 - Age – Women between 25 and 50 years of age were selected
 - Work experience – at least 2 years.

Sample

The sample constituted of 160 women, out of which 80 were working women and 80 non-working women belonging to an age range of 25–50 years. Both groups consisted of 40 married and 40 unmarried women. Convenient sampling technique was used. Ethical considerations were taken care of by the investigators.

RESEARCH DESIGN

2*2 factorial design was used.

Tools

1. The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) developed by Kessler and Mroczek (1992) was used to measure psychological distress.
2. Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener *et al.* (1985) was used to assess life satisfaction. The scale is appropriate for all age groups.

Data Analyses and Interpretation of Results

The data were analyzed on the basis of two-way analysis of variance.

The mean scores for psychological distress and life satisfaction are shown in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation for Psychological Distress and Life Satisfaction among Working and Non-working Married/Unmarried Women. While Figure 1 shows the mean between the above said groups.

The summary of analysis of variance for Psychological Distress is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the *F* ratio for marital status (factor A) was found to be significant at 0.05 level ($F = 5.834, P < 0.05$). Thereby, suggesting a significant difference among working and non-working married/unmarried women in terms of psychological distress. Therefore, the 1st hypothesis that "There would be no significant difference in psychological distress between married and unmarried women" was rejected.

For employability (factor B), no significant difference was found ($F = 0.717, P > 0.05$). It suggests that employability does not play a significant role in psychological distress for working and non-working women. Hence, the 2nd hypothesis stating that "There would be no significant difference in psychological distress between working and non-working women" is accepted. For the interaction effect between marital status and employability (factor A*factor B), no significant interaction effect has been observed ($F = 3.537, P > 0.01$). Thus, the researcher accepts the 3rd hypothesis stating that "There would be no significant interaction effect of employability and marital status on psychological distress" [Figure 2 shows no significant interaction in Psychological distress among married/ unmarried, working and non-working women].

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation for Life satisfaction among Married/Unmarried, Working and Non-working Women.

While Figure 3 shows the mean between the above said groups. Table 4 represents the summary table of analysis of variance for life satisfaction. The *F* ratio for marital status (factor A) was found to be significant at 0.01 level ($F = 11.931, P < 0.01$). Thus, there is a significant difference present among working and non-working married/unmarried women in terms of life satisfaction. Thereby rejecting the 4th hypothesis that, "There would be no significant difference in life satisfaction between married and unmarried women." For employability (factor B), no significant difference is found ($F = 1.441, P > 0.05$). Hence, the 5th hypothesis that "There would be no significant difference in life satisfaction between working and non-working women" is accepted. The interaction effect between marital status and employability (factor A * factor B) shows a significant difference at 0.01 level ($F = 7.130, P < 0.01$). Thus, the researcher rejects the 6th hypothesis that "There would be no significant interaction effect of employability and marital status on life satisfaction" [Figure 4 shows significant interaction in life satisfaction among married/ unmarried, working and non-working women].

DISCUSSION

Researches have shown that marital transition leads to psychological distress endured by women. Hashmi *et al.* (2013) investigated the relationship between marital adjustment, stress, and depression. There were 150 working and non-working

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of psychological distress

Variable Name	Marital Status	Employability	Mean	Standard deviation	n
Psychological Distress	Married	Working Women	19.7250	8.11768	40
		Non-Working Women	23.5500	7.82157	40
	Unmarried	Working Women	25.7500	9.79730	40
		Non-Working Women	24.3000	9.57347	40

Table 2: Summary of analysis of variance for psychological distress

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Significant
Corrected model	793.669a	3	264.556	3.363	0.020
Intercept	87095.556	1	87095.556	1106.987	0.000
Marital status	459.006	1	459.006	5.834	0.017
Employability	56.406	1	56.406	0.717	0.398
Marital status×employability	278.256	1	278.256	3.537	0.062
Error	12273.775	156	78.678		
Total	100163.000	160			
Corrected total	13067.444	159			

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of life satisfaction

Variable Name	Marital status	Employability	Mean	Standard deviation	n
Life satisfaction	Married	Working women	24.2500	6.65544	40
		Non-working women	22.7500	6.24602	40
	Unmarried	Working women	18.0000	6.00000	40
		Non-working women	21.9500	6.87974	40

Table 4: Summary of analysis of variance for life satisfaction

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Significant
Corrected model	854.075a	3	284.692	6.834	0.000
Intercept	75603.025	1	75603.025	1814.780	0.000
Marital status	497.025	1	497.025	11.931	0.001
Employability	60.025	1	60.025	1.441	0.232
Marital status×employability	297.025	1	297.025	7.130	0.008
Error	6498.900	156	41.660		
Total	82956.000	160			
Corrected total	7352.975	159			

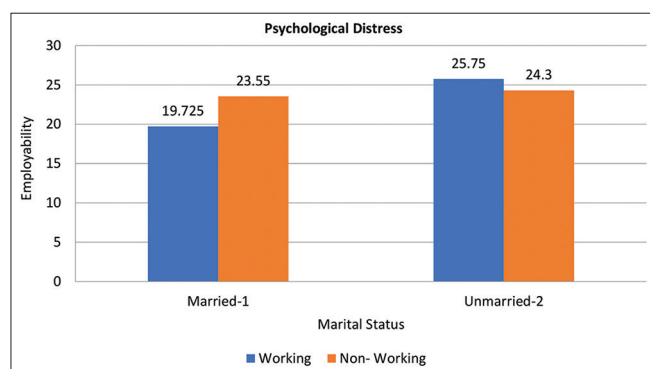


Figure 1: The mean values between the groups for psychological distress

married women in the study between 18 years and 50 years of age. The findings showed a very important correlation between marital transition, depression, and stress. The results suggested that, compared to non-working married women, working married women have to face more issues in their married life. Unlike these results, the present study found that there was no significant difference between working and non-working women in terms of psychological distress. The present research was conducted in 2021–2022 during the Pandemic, and therefore, women were facing psychological distress irrespective of whether they were working or not. Hence, the opposite results are observed.

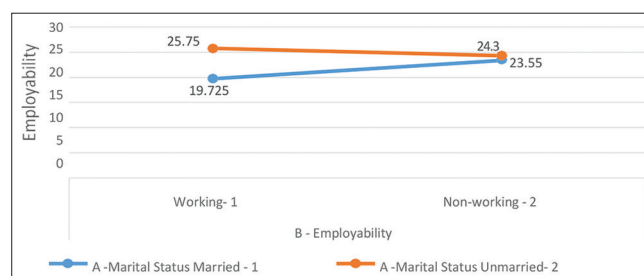


Figure 2: No Significant interaction among married/ unmarried, working and non-working women

A study on life satisfaction among married and unmarried women by Ghosh (2016) confirms the result of the present study that there is a significant difference between married and unmarried women in terms of life satisfaction. Literature review by Singh (2014) establishes that working and non-working women differed significantly in satisfaction with their lives. The finding of the present study also reveals no significant difference in life satisfaction between working and non-working women. Research conducted by Kaur (2013) found similar results for psychological quality of life of working women and housewives.

The investigation conducted by Akbari (2012) on the existence of stress as well as life satisfaction among working and non-working mothers is in tune with the results of the present study showing a

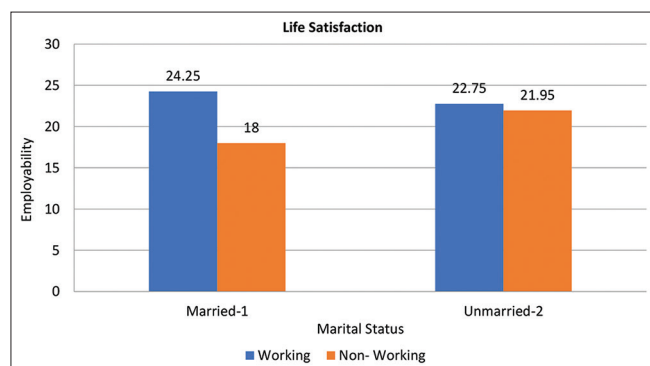


Figure 3: The mean values between the groups for life satisfaction

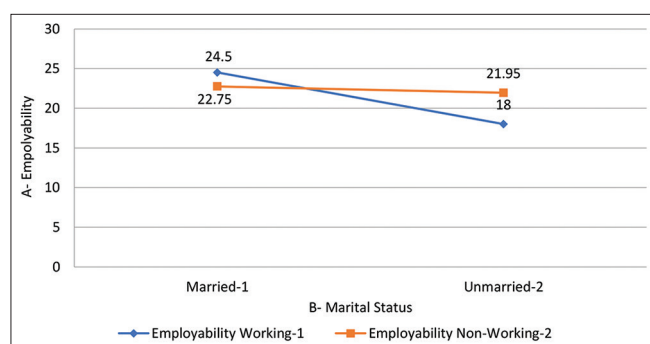


Figure 4: Significant interaction in life satisfaction among working and non-working married/unmarried women

significant interaction effect of marital status and employability on life satisfaction. Stress was found to be significantly higher among working mothers than non-working mothers; also, life satisfaction was better among working mothers than non-working mothers. Aggarwal (2001) studied life satisfaction among working and non-working women and found substantial differences in the life satisfaction of working and non-working women. Non-working women reflected higher life satisfaction than working women.

CONCLUSION

Women are the powerhouse of the society. Their well-being is the prime responsibility of any society to thrive. They are the nurturer and provider for their family. Hence, the current research throws light on the psychological distress and life satisfaction among women, whether working or not, and their marital status. It is highly recommended that well-being and life satisfaction should be the focus of importance for any country to grow and prosper. The implication of the study is to evaluate the well-being of women from time to time, provide proper interventions if needed, and counsel those around them to be sensitive, caring, and empathetic towards their roles in whatever capacity it might be, and ultimately contributing to a more equitable and fulfilling society for all.^[21-27]

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