

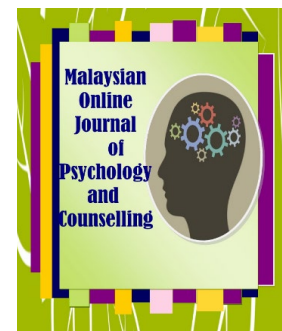
## PERSONALITY AND MARITAL SATISFACTION IN DUAL EARNER COUPLES: A MEDIATING ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Maheen Abid<sup>1\*</sup>, Sadia Saleem<sup>2</sup>, Ali Bukhari<sup>3</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the role of social support as a mediating variable between personality factors and marital satisfaction among dual-earner couples. The cross-sectional research design was used to collect sample from Lahore in the duration of October 2019-January 2020. A sample of 239 dual earner married individuals (51%, women; 49%, men) was recruited through purposive sampling technique. A demographic form, Big Five Inventory, Multidimensional Prescribed Social Support Scale and Couples Satisfaction Index were used to collect data. Pearson Correlation revealed that only neuroticism was found to be associated significantly negatively with perceived social support and marital satisfaction. Mediation analysis revealed that social support fully mediates the relationship between neuroticism and marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is a construct influenced by multiple factors. Individual's personality and perceived social support has a significant contribution in the perception of marital satisfaction in dual-earner couples. As the number of dual career couples is on a hike, the results of the study would help in targeting a large sub section of the population.

**Keywords:** *Marital Satisfaction, Social Support, Personality, Neuroticism, Dual Earners*



**Volume 9 (2),  
December 2022**

**<sup>1</sup> Institute of Psychology,  
Beaconhouse National  
University, PAKISTAN**

**<sup>2</sup> University of  
Management and  
Technology, PAKISTAN**

**<sup>3</sup> University of  
Management and  
Technology, PAKISTAN**

**Corresponding Author:  
maheen.abid@bnu.edu.pk**

## INTRODUCTION

The formation and stability of a family is largely dependent on the quality of the marital relationship in couples (Khademi et al., 2015). Dysfunctional and dissatisfied marital relationship largely effect couples and families and cause loneliness, anxiety, depression, low self-confidence and unhappiness in life (Faizal et al., 2017; Janati et al., 2010 & Shiyuan et al., 2020). Marital satisfaction is a subjective evaluation of the satisfaction in a marriage resulting from sexual and emotional relationship, mutual support and respect, a sense of understanding, and positive communication (Abbasi et al., 2011), which results in happiness, satisfaction with life and psychological well-being (Bashiri et al., 2016; Proulx et al., 2007). Marriage and work are two major aspects of a person's life and more couples are now dual careers which influence their family life mainly because of role overload and work related stress (Fellows et al., 2016). A number of studies have shown that dual earners have less marital satisfaction because of the stress related to work as compared to single career couples (Janati et al., 2010; Kalliath et al., 2011).

Personality has generally been defined as a set of characteristics including the patterns of thinking, feeling, or behaving. For a behavior, feeling or thinking to be categorized as a personality trait, it needs to be consistent over the span of time yet show some variation across different specific situations. The basic model for personality is generally referred to as Big-5 or Five-Factor Model of personality. This model was originally developed and proposed by Costa and McCrae (1992). According to them, there are five basic broad bi-dimensional trait categories of personality. Each trait exists on a continuum with the least intensity level at one end and maximum at the other. These 5 bipolar traits include openness to experience, conscientiousness, neuroticism, extraversion and agreeableness. Moreover, personality is said to influence the quality of marital relationship as when people commit themselves in a marital relationship, it becomes a bond between two distinct personality types that also adds a source of stress in their quality of marital relationship (Sadeghi et al., 2016). There are many different types of personality found in the literature but most researchers agree upon the five-factor theory which comprised conscientiousness, openness to experience, neuroticism, extraversion and agreeableness (John & Srivastava, 1999; Barelds, 2005).

The trait of neuroticism would predict a higher level of marital discord and dissatisfaction in the couple (Sayehmiri, 2020). Neuroticism not only leads to deterioration of the relationship but also leads the person to develop mental health issues which further affect the relationship negatively (Ervasti et al., 2019). Due to their own neurotic traits and complications in personality, such individuals generally don't find themselves capable to enjoy a healthy marital relationship (Drahman & Yusof, 2018). While other traits show a positive relationship with marital satisfaction largely, the most frequently positively associated traits are conscientiousness and openness. Conscientious individuals consider their relationship as their responsibility and like any other task they do, they try to contribute to the fullest to their marriage as well. Agreeableness also acts as a predictor for marital satisfaction. Such individuals are highly emotionally responsive to others' emotional needs. When either of the spouses in the couple possesses the trait of agreeableness, both the spouses perceive their relationship as a satisfying one (Ervasti et al., 2019). Extraverts tend to be outgoing and sociable. These traits enable them to have a life outside their home as well. Being socially active results in higher chances for dual-career spouses to have a better sense of subjective well-being which improves their chances for a satisfying marriage.

Many studies have found that neuroticism is related to poor marital satisfaction, where individual indulge more into the feelings of low self-esteem, low mood, loneliness, prolonged anger, easily get frustrated, poor problem solving skills and eventually less happy in life (Ahadi, 2007; Finn et al.,

2013; Khademi et al., 2015; Shiyuan et al., 2020; Vater & Schroder, 2015). On the other hand, there are two factors have been found to be associated positively with high marital satisfaction. One is conscientiousness while the other one is agreeableness (Schaffhuser et al., 2014).

Another factor that significantly contributes to the level of marital satisfaction is social support which refers to the perception of an individual about being a part of social network with a mutual sense of affection, support and help when needed. Generally, support is referred to as an anchor point and a place of adherence for anything. In this way, social support would refer to the phenomenon of holding onto human support, depending upon someone and having the feeling of being anchored. Social support is the assurance provided by society, friends, relatives, family, siblings, acquaintances, children and others. This reassurance is generally understood in terms of perception. Similar kinds of social support have been perceived differently by different individuals depending upon a variety of factors. It's about knowing that there are people around us whom we can trust, rely on and depend upon (Yıldırım, 2004). Social support is positively associated with improved mental health functioning, psychological well-being, stress reduction, quality of life and a sense of self-efficacy (Chi et al., 2011). Social support from family, friends and spouse buffer against stress, negative life events and balance between work and family, improves interpersonal functioning and quality of marital relationship (Namayandeh et al., 2010).

Changing socio-demographic picture in Pakistan has resulted many women with family responsibilities to take jobs as well which greatly influence the psychosocial functioning of the families (Jaffer et al., 2019). It is evident from literature that work-related stressors and specific personality type may influence the quality of marital relationship and in this context, the importance of studying the role of social support becomes even more important which justify the rationale and uniqueness of carrying out the current study. Social support is generally significantly related with marital satisfaction (Khan & Aftab, 2013). A total of 20% of the weightage for a satisfying marriage can be contributed solely to the existence of perceived social support in a marriage (Abbasi & Montazar, 2019).

In a collectivistic culture like Pakistan, such a variable has even more room for receiving approval. In such cultures, people are knitted closely with each other. This develops a lot of expectations and dependence on others around us. Families support each other in times of crisis and people have learned that I would not be alone in the hour of need (Kagiticbasi et al., 2010).

The significance of social support in our culture is therefore twofold. In such cultures, if an individual starts believing that he or she does not possess the family or friend's support, it might lead to many negative consequences. Having a lack of social support network would lead to several challenges like marital instabilities (Abbas et al., 2019). Couples in a satisfying marriage tend to have better social support from their spouse, family, friends and society at large. Social support plays its part in enhancing the capability of a couple to improve their adjustment in their marriage (Ahmad & Khan, 2018). The relationship between all the variables included in the study has been depicted in the following Figure 1.

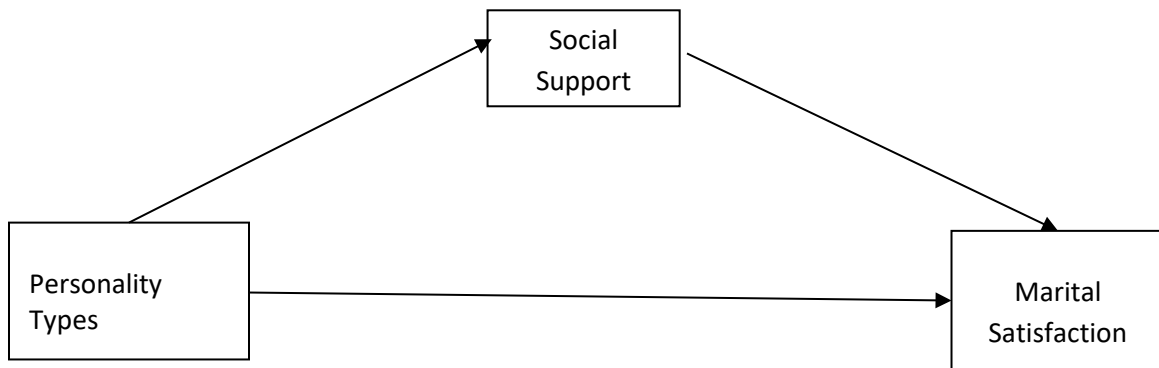


Figure 1. Showing the conceptual framework of the variables of personality types, social support and marital satisfaction.

The current study is aimed to identify the mediating role of social support that is demonstrated in the health of a marital relationship while keeping the personality factors in view. The study was an indigenous work as it explored the variables amongst a sample of working males and females among Pakistani couples. It is important to note that Pakistan is a collectivistic religious society where marriage is considered a sacred bond not only between two individuals but in two families. In collectivistic cultures like Pakistan, family has a supreme role and group harmony and family support is more important than the personal goals (Saleem et al., 2019). Unlike Western countries, marital problems and discord are more likely to be discussed with extended family with the hope of getting support (Goodwin & Cramer, 2000). Moreover, the perception of social support from family tend to improve work-family balance which increase marital satisfaction. Therefore, in this context, social support plays a critical role other than the personal personality factors to determine the marital satisfaction.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

A cross-sectional research design was used to conduct the study after getting the approval from IRB.

### *Participants*

The participants of the study constituted 239 married individuals, with an age range of 21-50 years ( $M=29.46$ ,  $SD=5.79$ ). The sampling strategy employed was purposive sampling technique. The inclusion criteria comprised of a married individual with dual earner spouse, minimum 2 years of marriage with at least one child. The data was collected after informed consent and reassurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

### *Measures*

The measures included The Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999) measures five distinct personality *extraversion* ( $\alpha =.81$ ), *agreeableness* ( $\alpha =.74$ ), *conscientiousness* ( $\alpha =.71$ ), *neuroticism* ( $\alpha =.77$ ), *openness* ( $\alpha =.70$ ), comprising 44 items with 5 point option 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (strongly agree); Multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988) comprising 12 statements ( $\alpha =.79$ ) with a 7-point rating scale 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree),

intended to evaluation of perceived social support from family, friends, and major people in life; Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI; Funk & Rogge, 2007) is a 16-item scale ( $\alpha = .83$ ) which measures the quality of marital relationship in couples. CSI has different response formats for different questions.

## **Research Procedure**

The current study was approved from the Institutional Review Board at University of Management and Technology. The institution's standard procedure was followed to seek ethical approval. Significant research ethics were followed during the data collection including a verbal agreement to participate in the research was carried out from participants. Approval was also sought from Institution Review Board (IRB) in order to maintain higher ethical standards. Additionally, participants were also cleared that their participation in the research is voluntary. Furthermore, participants were fully allowed to quit from the research at any point of time. Moreover, they were also assured about the confidentiality and privacy of the information taken from them. Finally, purpose of the research project was also briefed to them.

## **Statistical Analysis**

Data was analysed using SPSS 23. Pearson correlation was used to explore the statistical relationship among personality types, social support and marital satisfaction. In order to explore the role of social support as a mediating variable between neuroticism and marital satisfaction, mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes bootstrapping approach (Hayes, 2018).

## **RESULTS**

*Table 1: Frequency and Percentages of the Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N = 239)*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>f (%)</i>
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Men</i>	117(49)
	<i>Women</i>	122(51)
<i>Age</i>	<i>21-30 years</i>	79(33)
	<i>31-40 years</i>	120(50)
	<i>41-50 years</i>	40(17)
<i>Type of Marriage</i>	<i>Choice Marriage</i>	112(47)
	<i>Arrange Marriage</i>	127(53)
<i>Family System</i>	<i>Nuclear</i>	91(38)
	<i>Joint</i>	148(62)

*Note. f=frequency*

*Table 2: Inter-Correlations among Personality Factors, Social Support and Marital Satisfaction Scale*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>CSI</i>
<i>E</i>	26.00	4.53	-	.17	.42***	-.24*	.37***	.33***	.07
<i>A</i>	32.80	4.82	-	-	.50***	-.23*	.39***	.35***	.17
<i>C</i>	31.37	4.67	-	-	-	-.18	.22*	.26**	.20
<i>N</i>	24.75	6.06	-	-	-	-	-.01	-.21*	-.27**
<i>O</i>	34.78	4.08	-	-	-	-	-	.40***	.15
<i>SS</i>	5.24	1.16	-	-	-	-	-	-	.36***
<i>CSI</i>	62.28	12.90	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

*Note. E = Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; N = Neuroticism; O = Openness; SS = Social Support; CSI = Couple Satisfaction Index. \*\*\*p < .001, \*\*p < .01, \*p < .05, df = 238.*

*The relationship between the study variables has been explored. Correlation was used to determine the nature of the relationship between social support, personality factors and marital satisfaction. The table indicated above shows that the correlation between extraversion and social support is highly positively significant ( $r = .33, p < .001$ ). Similar statistically positive correlation has been found between agreeableness and social support ( $r = .35, p < .001$ ). Similar trend has been indicated in the relationship between conscientiousness and social support ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ) as well as openness and social support ( $r = .40, p < .001$ ). Marital satisfaction has also found to be significantly positively associated with social support ( $r = .36, p < .001$ ). While the results of Table 2 also show that the association between neuroticism with social support ( $r = -.21, p < .05$ ) is significantly negative. Marital satisfaction has also found to be significantly negatively associated with neuroticism ( $r = -.22, p < .05$ ). However, no significant association of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness with marital satisfaction was found.*

### **Mediation Analysis**

*The correlation analysis conducted has been indicative of the fact that there had been statistically significant relationships identified between social support, marital satisfaction and neuroticism. It has been identified that social support mediates between neuroticism and marital satisfaction. In order to explore the mediating role of social support, Hayes (Funk & Rogge, 2007) approach of bootstrapping was used so that it could be concluded that social support can be considered as a mediating variable between neuroticism and marital satisfaction, or not.*

*The results of the analysis have been presented in Figure 2 shows that total effect of neuroticism on marital satisfaction ( $\beta = -.63, SE = .35, p < .05$ ) was significant. It has also been observed that neuroticism's direct effect on social support also turned out to be statistically significant ( $\beta = -.18, SE = .02, p < .05$ ). Moreover, it has also been found that social support's direct effect on marital satisfaction had been statistically significant ( $\beta = 6.83, SE = 1.74, p < .001$ ). The results of the analyses indicated that social support had been found to be fully mediating the relationship between neuroticism and marital satisfaction. Since it has been found that the direct effect of neuroticism on marital satisfaction was not significant when the role of social support as a mediating variable was controlled ( $\beta = -.46, SE = .33, p = .17$ ).*

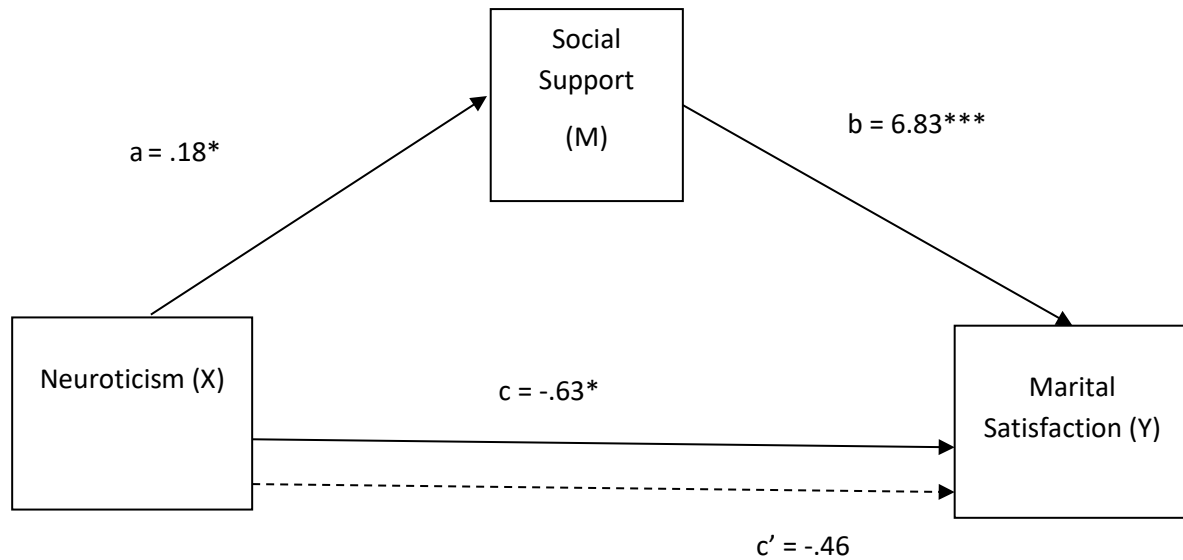


Figure 2. Mediation model showing the mediational role of social support (M) between neuroticism (X) and marital satisfaction (Y).

Table 3: Regression Coefficients, Standard Error, and Model Summary Information for the Neuroticism, Social Support and Marital Satisfaction of Dual Career Couples Mediation Analysis (N=239)

	Consequent							
		M(SS)			Y(MS)			
Antecedent		$\beta$	SE	P		$\beta$	SE	p
N (X)	a	-.18	.02	.04*	c'	-.46	.33	.17
SS(M)		---	---	---	B	6.83	1.74	.001***
Constant	i	5.85	.46	.001***	I	75.59	13.22	.001***
		$R^2 = .02$				$R^2 = .15$		
		$F(1,237) = 1.91, p = .03^*$				$F(2,236) = 9.59, p = .001^{***}$		

Note. N= Neuroticism, SS= Social Support, MS = Marital Satisfaction.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## DISCUSSION

The present study is a systematic attempt to explore the association between different types of personality and marital satisfaction with the mediating role of social support in dual-earner men and women. There has been literature available that shows an association between personality type and level of marital satisfaction (Abbasi et al., 2011; Barelds, 2005; Janati et al., 2010; Khademi et al., 2015; Sadeghi et al, 2016) as well as relationship between social support and marital satisfaction (Chi

et al., 2011; Namayandeh et al., 2010). Yet the current study is unique as it compares the mediational role of social support in traditional context of Pakistan in dual earner men and women. Moreover, dual-earner marriages also play a significant contribution in the perception of relationship quality, social support and family functioning (Fellows et al., 2016; Kalliath et al., 2011).

Results indicate that in the present sample, only neurotic personality types are found to be associated with marital satisfaction which is in line with previous literature (Abbasi et al., 2011; Ahadi, 2007; Finn et al., 2013; Janati et al., 2010). The reasons for low satisfaction in people with neurotic personality as they have irritable and low mood, unable to maintain work-family life balance, negative interpretation of life events, and poor problem solving skills (Finn et al., 2013; Vater & Schroder, 2015). People with neurotic personality type tend to have a hostile communication style and low frustration tolerance which result in inability to handle work related stress, as well as have difficulty in maintaining balance in dual role of a professional hence a spouse may interrupt their normal family and professional functioning (Fellows et al., 2016). Literature has also showed support for the results. Soto (2018) found out that neuroticism has the most negative associations. Neurotic individuals are at an increased risk of having a poor state of psychological well-being. They report psychological issues like depression and anxiety very commonly. They report the lowest levels of subjective wellness, satisfaction from life and the relationships in life.

The stated conclusions can be related to some targeted research finding in this regard. Neuroticism predicts poor adjustment and satisfaction from their relationships. Neurotic people would less likely be satisfied with their partners and marriage. The trait of neuroticism would predict a higher level of marital discord and dissatisfaction in the couple (Sayehmiri, 2020). Neuroticism not only leads to deterioration of the relationship but also leads the person to develop mental health issues which further affect the relationship negatively (Ervasti et al., 2019). Due to their own neurotic traits and complications in personality, such individuals generally don't find themselves capable to enjoy a healthy marital relationship (Drahman & Yusof, 2018). While other traits show a positive relationship with marital satisfaction largely.

Results further revealed that social support plays a role of a buffer against neuroticism and marital satisfaction. Social support has been found to be positively correlated with marital satisfaction. In addition to the role of mental health issues as one of the consequences of a dissatisfying marriage, they can also act as contributors to one such marriage. Zaheri et al. (2016) shared that if husbands or wives suffer from any psychological issue or have a poor psychological health condition, this would affect their marital life negatively and they might experience lower levels of marital satisfaction despite the fact that many other predicting factors would already be there. In addition to social support, spousal emotional support has also been an important factor. Perception about available support improves mental health functioning, reduce stress and improves quality of relationships (Chi et al., 2011; Namayandeh et al., 2010). Individual who perceives receiving social support tend to feel satisfied and harmonious in their work and personal life (Kalliath et al., 2011). This may be an indicator that in collectivistic culture like Pakistan (Goodwin & Cramer, 2000; Sadia et al., 2019). Marriage is not an individual matter rather than a family matter and therefore it has been found that social support from significant others plays a vital role in married lives of dual-earner couples.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The study results could help clinical psychologists, marital counselors and family therapists to help couples deal with their marriage effectively in light of personality traits and social support. Furthermore, the findings of the research would help psychologists identify specific determinants that contribute towards marital satisfaction. The results indicated that personalities high on



neuroticism tend to have lower levels of marital satisfaction. Clinical psychologists and therapists could help in improving the health of a marital relationship by focusing on personality assessment and then combating those issues first. Rather than dealing with the marital relationship at hand, it would make more sense if counsellors would begin by addressing risk and protective factors. The practitioners could also work on social support of the spouses. Identifying the role of risk and protective factors would ultimately help the professionals to understand the relationship and enhance the quality of a marital relationship. Mass level awareness campaigns could be run in order to educate the masses so that they could be aware of the role of social support and personality types in a prospective running marital relationship.

## LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study has several limitations, firstly, the cross-sectional research design was used and future research can utilize longitudinal data in order to make more empirical inferences.

Secondly, the sample was not diverse that could ensure generalizability, thus further studies can be focused on rural and urban samples with different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Lastly, the sample of the present research consisted of men and women belonging to dual earner couples. While in future, same couples can be studied with reference to marital satisfaction with other psychosocial variables.

## CONCLUSION

The topic of dual-earner and its implication for psychosocial and emotional functioning of a family in the changing urbanization of Pakistani cultural context is very pertinent. This research aimed to identify some of the risk or protective factors that influence the quality of marital relationship. The findings revealed that neurotic personality type can become a risk factor and social support can be a protective factor for the marital satisfaction among couples. The findings have great implications for family counselling and timely intervention.

**Declaration:** This study has never been submitted for publication anywhere else.

**Disclaimer:** The study is part of a Ph.D. thesis.

There is no conflict in interest among the authors.

There had been no funding source for this study.

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