Emotional Competence and Marital Adjustment among Childless Women

Shabir Ahmad Malik
Research Scholar, Dept TT & NFE, IASE
Faculty of Education, Jamia Millia Islamia
New Delhi, INDIA

ABSTRACT

Childlessness is defined as the inability to achieve pregnancy after one year of unprotected sexual intercourse. It is linked not only with psychological problems like low self-esteem, depression and anxiety but it also affects marital adjustment of a couple. Therefore, the aim of this study was to study Emotional Competence and marital adjustment among childless women. This was a descriptive and correlational study. Its sample consisted of two groups, i.e., childless women (n = 100), women with children (100) selected through purposive sampling technique from three Districts (Ganderbal, Srinagar and Baramulla) of Kashmir Valley. Adapted version of Dyadic Adjustment Scale and Emotional Competence Scale were used for data collection. Data analysis was done by IBM SPSS-20. It was found that women with children were higher on emotional competence as compare to childless women. Similarly, women with children were much better in marital adjustment as compared to the childless women. Results also indicated positive correlation between emotional competence and marital adjustment. Emotional competence can be considered as effective in the better adjustment of women.

Key words: Childless Women, Emotional Competence and Marital Adjustment

1. INTRODUCTION

Childlessness is defined as the inability to achieve pregnancy after one year of unprotected sexual intercourse. After a year’s unprotected sex, no pregnancy has taken place. [1] Women having no live birth or no living children at the end of reproductive life span. [73] It can result from different factors. [3] One can differentiate between involuntary childlessness (e.g. infertility), intended childlessness (those who do not intend to have children), voluntary childlessness (the “childfree”), and temporary childlessness (related to circumstantial or delayed
childbearing) which is neither voluntary nor involuntary. [3] Voluntary childlessness is referred as women in reproductive age and is fertile but have no intention to conceive. Women who have never had children, desire to remain childless and without any underlying assumption that they are advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to those with children. [4] Involuntary childlessness refers to those individuals who experience fertility problems. [5] Many early studies also assigned unmarried women to the category of “involuntarily childless”. [6] Different factors contributing to voluntary and involuntary childlessness. [7, 8] One of the major reasons for contemporary childlessness is lack of partner. [9, 10] Higher male education is usually related to lower childlessness, while the opposite is true for women. [11-14] The higher a woman’s level of education, the more likely she is to remain childless. [15-17] Among little educated women childlessness is also high. [18] In the past Childlessness was mainly involuntary, related to later entry to marriage or living unmarried, or to sub fecundity due to medical conditions. [7, 19] Infertility. [20, 21] Sub-fertility. [21] Health problems. [22] Socioeconomically disadvantaged men, such as the unemployed or those in low-paid jobs, are the most likely to remain childless. [15, 23] whilst self-employed men are the least likely. [17]

Childlessness which is a stressful situation affects the marital adjustment of married couple. Marital adjustment as satisfaction with the marital-relationship and the spouse. Satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, consensus and affectional expression are all indicators of marital adjustment. [24] There are many factors affecting the marital adjustment of couples. [25] Childlessness is one of the factors that affect marital stability. Childlessness is linked not only with psychological problems like low self-esteem, depression and anxiety but it also affects marital adjustment of a couple. [26] Parenthood makes marriages stronger and strengthens the relationship of a couple. [27] In the old age childless people experiences lack of social support and have a minimal strong network for independent living [28,29] Misunderstanding between the couples resulting into degraded sexual life which negatively affected their relationship. [30] Infertile women undergo a lot of negative social consequences that includes instability in marriage, stigmatization and exploitation. [68] Childless couples, who are married for at least a period of 10 years or more found that marital adjustment has been impacted significantly. [69] Childlessness results in pain and trauma, unfulfilled life, rejection from home and inadequate wellbeing. [69] Childless married women affected in various communities. [70] Childless women are further causing due to the expectations from family, relatives and society to fulfill the role of
motherhood. Childless couples are more likely to divorce than couples with children. Among infertile couples probability of divorce was found to be 2.20 times more as compared to fertile couples. Domestic violence is also common. Disharmony of marriage was more evident among childless couples. Poor quality relationship was associated with different family and community problems. Absence of role as a parent may have a negative impact on marital relations. Many couples are confronted with the problem of childlessness worldwide but little attention has been given to this problem. Women are left with feeling empty, defective, incomplete, undesirable and unworthy. In both men and women childlessness is associated with emotional responses such as depression, anxiety, guilt, social isolation, and decreased self-esteem. Stress placed on the marriage upon initiation of the childlessness. Stress is the amount of guilt felt by the partner who has been diagnosed as infertile. Women experienced significantly more psychological distress than their partners. In the community childless men have lesser status compared to their peers with children and their views may not be considered or they may not be allowed to contribute to societal discussions. Infertile couple goes through feelings of disbelief, denial, anxiety and loss of control, isolation and guilt.

Emotional competence is important in coping with these challenges. It is defined as the ability to perceive, regulate, and express one’s own emotions appropriately, and to perceive others’ emotions correctly. It is one of essential factor that can play a crucial role to cope with stressful situations. Those who have emotional competence are able to build life-long relationships. Emotional competence helps people develop tolerance and cope with life stressors. It facilitates recognizing one’s own motivations, feelings and desires which is important in effective communication to a partner. Infertility affects the marital relationship of couples. Women with infertility face familial and societal pressures regarding childlessness. Childless couple goes through stress and emotional distress, especially women. People having emotional competence can better handle their relationships. Emotional competence helps an individual in making his/her relationship productive and strong. Emotionally competent people are better able to resolve their conflicts as compared to others. This may be the reason they are able to deal with their marital issues intellectually than those with lower emotional competence. For the couple, infertility is considered a stressor or trauma in the journey of their new life.

Overall, studies show that childless women generally suffer from series of psychological and psychosomatic problems that includes distress, depression, anxiety, and loss of self-esteem,
shame and guilt. However, no study has been conducted on emotional competence and marital adjustment among childless women to date. On the basis of literature, three hypotheses were formulated: (1) There would be no significant difference of emotional competence among childless women and women with children, (2) There would be no significant difference of marital adjustment among childless women and women with children, (3) Women emotional competence would be significantly correlated with their marital adjustment.

2. METHODS

Sample
The study sample consisted of 200 participants. The sample consisted of two groups: childless women (N= 100) and women with children (N= 100) selected through purposive sampling technique from three Districts (Ganderbal, Srinagar and Baramulla) of Kashmir Valley. Childless women were contacted from Clinics, gynecologists, hospitals etc. women with children were contacted from various localities. The Participants were made clear about the nature and purpose of the study and about the voluntary basis of their participation. In order to elicit their true responses without any fear or inhibitions a rapport was established by assuring the participants of the confidentiality of their personal information.

Inclusion criteria
For the childless women inclusion criteria were as follows:

- The age range of the participants was 30-40.
- Marital status of the participants was 10 years and above.
- Married women living with husband.
- Participants were either currently under the treatment of infertility or had been under the treatment earlier.

For the women with children inclusion criteria were as follows:

- The age range of the participants was 30-40.
- Participants were having at least one child.
- Women who are married and living with their husband.

Exclusion criteria
For the participants exclusion criteria were as follows:

- Divorced and widows women were not included in the sample.
- Women without living child.
Measures

Emotional Competence Scale
Revised version of 30 items Emotional Competence Scale was used in this research. It measures five emotional competencies, namely a) Adequate Depth of Feeling (ADF), b) Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions (AECE), c) Ability to Function with Emotions (AFE), d) Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions (ACPE) and e) Enhancement of Positive Emotions (EPE). The scale consists of 6 items in each competence and based on the lines of Likert having five alternatives to each item. Scoring of these five alternatives follow a system of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 from upper to lower end.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale
Adapted version of Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used in this research. It has four subscales, namely 1) Dyadic Consensus, 2) Dyadic Satisfaction, 3) Affectional Expression and 4) Dyadic Cohesion. There are 32 items in the scale out of these, 13 Measure consensus, 10 measure satisfactions, 5 measure cohesion and 4 measures affectional expression.

Statistical analysis
The collected data was analyzed by using the appropriate statistical techniques with the help of SPSS-20.

Results
Table 1: Comparison of two groups childless women (n=100) and women with children (n=100) on Emotional Competence and its dimensions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adequate Depth of Feeling (ADF)</td>
<td>Childless Women</td>
<td>18.20</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>17.24</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women with children</td>
<td>27.30</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions (AECE)</td>
<td>Childless Women</td>
<td>15.27</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>12.03</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women with children</td>
<td>28.34</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Function with</td>
<td>Childless Women</td>
<td>16.45</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>19.50</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women with children</td>
<td>30.50</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions (AFE)</td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>t-value</td>
<td>Level of significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions (ACPE)</td>
<td>Childless Women</td>
<td>19.22</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>14.54</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women with children</td>
<td>27.29</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement of Positive Emotions (EPE)</td>
<td>Childless Women</td>
<td>13.22</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>10.98</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women with children</td>
<td>27.29</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Competence</td>
<td>Childless Women</td>
<td>40.04</td>
<td>10.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women with children</td>
<td>80.78</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>24.12</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 indicates comparison of two groups on Emotional competence. Results showed that two groups were statistically differed in their mean scores. The dimension wise difference revealed similar results as the two groups differ significantly with each other on all the dimensions of Emotional Competence. From the results it appeared that mean scores of women with children were significantly higher on Emotional Competence including dimensions (Adequate Depth of Feeling, Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions, Ability to Function with Emotions, Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions and Enhancement of Positive Emotions).

Table 2: Comparison of two groups childless women (n=100) and women with children (n=100) on Marital Adjustment and its dimensions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Level of significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affection Expression</td>
<td>Childless Women</td>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>10.12</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women with children</td>
<td>12.02</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>Childless Women</td>
<td>9.34</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>14.28</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women with children</td>
<td>14.40</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Childless Women</td>
<td>28.36</td>
<td>9.12</td>
<td>18.25</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women with children</td>
<td>45.12</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Childless Women</td>
<td>17.19</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>12.77</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women with children</td>
<td>30.80</td>
<td>7.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Adjustment</td>
<td>Childless Women</td>
<td>59.78</td>
<td>10.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows comparison of scores for two groups on marital adjustment. Results indicated that mean scores of two groups were statistically differed on Marital Adjustment including dimensions. From the results it appeared that mean scores of women with children were significantly higher on Marital Adjustment including dimensions (affectional expression, cohesion, consensus, satisfaction).

| Women with children | 100.41 | 14.89 | 20.98 | .001 |

Table 3: Coefficient of correlation between the scores of Emotional Competence and Marital adjustment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Competence</th>
<th>Marital Adjustment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adequate Depth of Feeling (ADF)</td>
<td>.48*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions (AECE)</td>
<td>.56*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Function with Emotions (AFE)</td>
<td>.66**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions (ACPE)</td>
<td>.52**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement of Positive Emotions (EPE)</td>
<td>.60**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Emotional Competence</td>
<td>.70**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<=.01 & *p<=.05

Table 3 shows correlation between Emotional Competence and its dimensions with Marital Adjustment. From the results it appeared that correlation was very strong and found statistically significant. The dimension wise analysis also showed similar results as all the dimensions of Emotional Competence were positively correlated with Marital Adjustment.

3. DISCUSSION

The present study was an attempt to study emotional competence and marital adjustment among childless women and women with children. While analyzing significant difference of emotional competence between childless women and women with children results revealed that mean scores of women with children were significantly higher on Emotional Competence including dimensions (Adequate Depth of Feeling, Adequate Expression and Control of Emotions, Ability to Function with Emotions, Ability to Cope with Problem Emotions and Enhancement of Positive Emotions). A literature review did not come up with any studies in which childless women and women with children are compared on the basis of emotional competence. From the
results it appeared that women with children were higher on emotional competence as compare
to childless women. The reason may be that women with children were handling the day to day stresses of life more effectively than childless women. Children are great source of motivation for them. Parenthood has a substantial and enduring positive effect on life satisfaction. [52] Childless women reported significantly lower level of life satisfaction and self-esteem than mothers. [53] Hence among women with children emotional competence can be attributed to the sense of satisfaction with life due to the presence of children. The great source of satisfaction among women with children is motherhood which helps them in the development of emotional competence. On the other hand childless women usually suffer from sense of insecurity, hopelessness and generally develop sense of dissatisfaction with life which make them emotionally vulnerable and generate negative thoughts. That is why, they are found to be suffering from lack of control on emotions. Due to childlessness they undergo a lot of negative emotions such as feelings of loss, anguish, anger, sorrow, sadness, lack of femininity, shame and self-blame. These negative emotions definitely affect the emotional competence in them. Hopelessness further affects the emotional competence in childless women. Lack of hope for a child is very important for a woman as it results in the grief and lowers down the sense of self-control and self-confidence. Childless women develop feelings of incompetency which may result in the development of negative attitude towards their own self. Childless people doubting their sexual ability, develop frustration and sometimes in developing mental disorders. [54] Therefore, childlessness tends to damage emotional competence of women.

Results also indicated that childless women had poor marital adjustment as compare to women with children. This is in line with the previous findings where it was showed that childlessness was the main factor related to the condition of poor marital adjustment and creates greater deterioration in marital functioning. [55] Marital adjustment of childless women was very low as compared to women who were fertile. [56] Childless women were having low autonomy and it can lead to marital separation. [22] Marital relationship is affected by childlessness. [54] Infertile couple reports poor marital adjustment and quality of life. [57] Females experience a greater amount of stress related to infertility and this stress was related to satisfaction, consensus, and affection. [72] It has been reported that Infertility threatens harmony in the marital relationship and family life. [58] Infertility not only affects marital adjustment but quality of life
Uneducated infertile females were less psychosocially adjusted than educated infertile females. Infertility women face more marital conflict than infertile men.

From the results it also appeared that there was a positive correlation between emotional competence and marital adjustment. A literature review did not come up with any studies that explored the relationship between emotional competence and marital adjustment but some other studies are consistent with the results that significant relationship between emotional competence and mental health among adolescents. Significant correlation between adjustment and emotional competence. Emotional competence would increase the motivation and effectiveness of the employee. Significant correlation between emotional competency and happiness. Negative correlation between emotional competence and depression. Emotional competence and dispositional optimism were significantly and negatively correlated with depressive symptoms.

4. CONCLUSION

Present study attempted to study emotional competence and marital adjustment among childless women. In the study it was found that women with children were higher on emotional competence as compare to childless women. Similarly, women with children were much better in marital adjustment as compared to the childless women. Results also indicated positive correlation between emotional competence and marital adjustment. Accordingly, emotional competence can be considered as effective in the better adjustment of women.

Limitations of the study

The study was conducted on childless women and women with children, childless males were not included in the study despite of the fact that they also get affected due to childlessness. Due to small sample size results of the present study cannot be truly generalized. The study considered only one moderator namely emotional competence of marital adjustment, there may be some more significant moderators for the childless women. Therefore it cannot be said confidently that women marital adjustment are moderator by emotional competence.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

REFERENCES


