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**IMPACT OF PERCEIVED PARENTAL CONFLICT ON THE  
MARITAL EXPECTATIONS AND MARITAL SATISFACTION  
OF YOUNG ADULTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The current study examined the impact of perceived parental conflict on marital expectations and marital satisfaction in young adults. A sample of 240 participants between ages of 19 to 40 years was selected using purposive sampling technique. The Children's Perception of Inter-Parental Conflict Scale (Grych et al., 1992), The Marital Scale (Park & Rosén, 2013), and Couple's Satisfaction Scale (Funk & Rogge, 2007) were used in the study as research measures. Linear Regression analysis was computed to test the hypotheses of the present study. The results reveal that perceived parental conflict is significantly associated with and contributes to marital expectation. Further, results reveal the significant association and contribution of perceived parental conflict on marital satisfaction in young adults. These findings have significant implications and suggests future research direction.*

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**Keywords:** *Perceived Parental Conflict, Marital Expectations, Marital Satisfaction, Young Adults*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Inter-Parental dispute refers to a pessimistic/gloomy effect between parents and includes behaviors of parents ranging from verbal abuses/disagreement and up to physical violence. These conflicts affect the house environment negatively. Furthermore, it has disturbing effects on young adult's behavior (Chaudary & Shabbir, 2018). In previous studies, varied interpretations of young adults' psychological well-being concerns including, social withdrawal, are linked with parental conflict (Forehand et al., 1988). Moreover, reduced self-conceit, decreased self-discerned competence, risen anxiety, inadequate internal control, immense levels of anger, and hostility/aggressiveness (Mechanic & Hansell, 1989; Enos & Handal, 1986). These psychological health issues create a negative attitude which will push the adolescent to look at marriage negatively. Hence, the research explores the relationship between the attitudes of young adults towards marriage due to their parental conflicts. It may be that perception of parental conflict is more important to the adolescent's attitude towards marriage than the actual recurrence or severity of the dispute/fight itself.

Marital expectations are obtained from observations, individual encounters in prior relations and are implemented today and projected into the tomorrow as guidelines for deriving aspired outcomes (Grafton, 1979). Relationship beliefs/attitudes and expectations are essential cognitions about thoughts and behaviours in intimate/private relationships (Riggio & Weiser, 2008). These attitudes and expectations regarding marriage form a cognitive schema concerning relationships, caused by the exposure (People who view marriage positively, it may affect their behavior, and those who keep a negative attitude towards marriage, it may also influence beliefs of relations). People who associate positivity with marriage see their current and future marriages as pleasant and victorious. But individuals who view marriage in a negative space see their marriage as unsuccessful and unhappy (Riggio & Weiser, 2008).

All of these challenges influence the relationship, marital quality and couple's marital satisfaction. This process continues as kids are born. But when children reach adolescence, it is the most crucial time for couples (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1987). Hence, a decrease in marital satisfaction leads to conflicts and children perceive the conflicts in a much more negative way than their intensity might be. As the negative perception builds among teens who grow up to be young adults, they tend to view marriages negatively and have a negative attitude towards marriage. Although couples who manage their conflicts well and

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are happy, satisfied, and feel positive in their relationship tend to pass it onto their children and young adults associate positivity with marriage.

Ganong et al. conducted a study (1981) on high school students who belonged to either intact, divorced, or reconstituted families regarding their perceptions and attitudes. The study investigated these people's attitudes almost two decades later. Adolescents grow to become young adults so they start exploring various aspects of their life including, dating, romantic relations, and prospects of impending marriage. The attitudes of young adults towards marriage are impacted due to the presence of inter-parental conflict and hostility even if they do not witness parental divorce (Jones & Nelson, 1996). When a child witnesses a high level of conflict in one's parent's marriage, it creates surroundings filled with negative marital beliefs and emotions for them (Jones & Nelson, 1996). Whether adolescents belong to divorced or non-divorced families, inter-parental conflict harms the way young adults see marriage.

Whether young adults belong to divorced or non-divorced families, the presence of inter-parental disputes is a damaging element regarding their expectations towards marriage. How an offspring perceives the dealing of conflicts between parents and the way they are dealt with impacts their future marriage. According to Herzog and Cooney (2000), parents play an essential part in the lives of their children and their role models as children look up to them in every circumstance. In addition, Amato and Booth (2001) conducted a study on the link between parents' divorce, conflicts in families, and decreased expectations of marriage. The results stated a significant connection between negative childhood experiences and negative attitudes of young adults towards marriage.

The well-being of children is influenced by the disputes and divorce of their parents (Amato, 2010). Just parents' divorce is a mere factor to cause negative outcomes for their children, but in reality, the conflict and violence in the marriage cause negative ends. Furthermore, family surroundings are also a crucial element for developing the identities of young adults (Markland & Nelson, 1993). In the light of previous researches, this research aims to examine the impact of conflicts of parents on marriage expectations and marital satisfaction of young adults. Perceived parental conflict will lead to a negative attitude which will further lead to negative marital expectations.

Many recent pieces of research have focused on the effects of divorce on the marital relationships of individuals (Whitton et al., 2008). However, these

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findings do not highlight the relationship between perceived parental conflict on the marital expectations and marital satisfaction of young adults. Although a lot of evidence about the correlation of parental divorce and parental conflict on the romantic relations of adolescents is present, little evidence is found regarding the impact on the marital expectations and attitudes of young adults and individuals who have recently married and have committed to a romantic relationship. To bridge this gap, this research is conducted. One of the purposes of this research was to highlight the issues an individual may go through due to parental conflict, which may affect their expectations towards marriage and their marital satisfaction. Also, it aimed to understand what measures to take to counter this problem among young adults it is vital to know whether parental conflict plays a vital role in shaping the marital expectations of young adults who have committed themselves to a marital relationship.

It was hypothesized that:

1. Perceived parental conflict will have an impact on the marital expectations of young adults.
2. Perceived parental conflict will have an impact on the marital satisfaction of young adults.

## **METHOD**

### ***Participants***

The participants of the study comprised of a sample of 240 young married adults between the ages of 19-40 years and belonging to different academic and socio-economic backgrounds. The purposive sampling technique was used to recruit the participants based on following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

#### *Inclusion Criteria:*

- Married individuals between the ages of 19-40 years
- Must be married for at least one year

#### *Exclusion Criteria:*

- Divorced or separated from the spouse
- Individuals/couples who have step-parents

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### ***Measures***

#### **Children's Perception of Inter-Parental Conflict Scale**

The Children's Perception of Inter-Parental Conflict Scale (CPIC) is a psychological tool to measure perceived parental conflict by Fincham (2013). It consists of a total of 48 statements rated on three-point Likert scale is used to measure the examinee's answers; True, Sort-of-true, and false. Three factors analytically resulting sub-scales (Threat, Conflict Properties, Self-Blame), have internal consistency (above 0.70 for all scales), and test-retest reliability. The conflict properties scale's validity was backed by the parents' opinions of conflict and records of children's adjustment. In addition, the threat and self-blame scales are associated with children's replies to particular conflict articles.

#### **The Marital Scale**

The Marital Scale (TMS) developed by Park and Rosén (2013) assesses three features of marital beliefs including; the intention of marrying, favorable and unfavorable attitudes towards marriage, and expectations for marital relationship. It consists of a total of 31 statements and rated on a five-point Likert Scale. The TMS has included three sub-scales. Intent to marry (ITM) had internal consistency reliability of .91. The General Attitude towards Marriage Scale (GAMS) consisted of 10 items with internal consistency reliability of .84. It included the general attitudes towards marriage with factors, which are positive attitudes and 3-factors of negative attitudes, including fears and doubts. The Aspects of Marriage Scale (AMS) comprised of 13 items having  $\alpha=0.92$  internal consistency reliability. These elements included trust, meaning, romance, finances, respect, and physical intimacy. The level for the intent to marry, positive and negative approach towards marriage, and marital aspects were defined operationally using public domains for low and high scores. Full scale was used in this research.

#### **Couples' Satisfaction Index**

The Couple's Satisfaction Index (CSI-16) is developed by Funk and Rogge (2007) to evaluate the relationship satisfaction of people who are married, dating, and cohabiting. The scores of CSI-16 distinguish between two types of relationships; distressed and non-distressed. Couple's satisfaction index scales consist of many response scales; Likert and ordinal scales. The total score is the total sum of the participant's point values which can range from 0 to 81. Higher

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scores mean that the relationship satisfaction is high, but scores below 51.5 show that the relationship satisfaction is low. Nevertheless, a few limitations are also present including, the lack of information on test-retest reliability. Secondly, there is a lack of evidence to confirm that this scale is sensitive to change in short interventions. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of CSI reported by authors is .98 indicating excellent internal consistency.

### ***Procedure***

This study involved a correlational survey design. Firstly, the researchers took permission from the authors of the scales. After which, a structured questionnaire was compiled including, the consent form, demographic form, followed by the CPIC, TMS, and the CSI. Then the questionnaires were circulated to the participants online. Participants were informed and instructed regarding the purpose and nature of this research, the possible harm, their voluntary participation, and the confidentiality of their demographic information through informed consent. The instructions for the participants were present in the questionnaires. Participants took approximately 20-30 minutes to fill the questionnaire. After collecting the responses, all the questionnaires were analyzed to view the results.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Ethical considerations were followed during the study including maintaining confidentiality of the participant and seeking permission from authors. Firstly, the authors of the scales permitted the researchers to use the scales as a measure in this research. It was voluntary participation, and participants signed the informed consent. Moreover, participants had the right to withdraw at any stage if they felt uncomfortable.

### ***Statistical Analysis***

The statistical methods used for the analysis of data in present study were descriptive statistics and linear regression analysis. All analyses were done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 21).

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### RESULTS

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 240)*

Characteristics	f	%
Gender		
Male	122	50.8
Female	118	49.2
Socioeconomic Status		
Lower Class	5	2.1
Lower Middle Class	17	7.1
Middle Class	123	51.2
Upper Middle Class	77	32.1
Upper Class	18	7.5
Qualification		
Metric/O levels	20	8.3
Intermediate/A levels	16	6.7
Bachelors	89	37.1
Masters	96	40.0
PhD/MPhil/Doctorate	17	7.1
Family Structure		
Nuclear	96	40
Joint	144	60
Parents live		
Yes	224	93.3
No	16	6.7
Parents Marital Status		
Married	215	89.6
Divorced	8	3.3
Separated	4	1.7
Other	13	5.4

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**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Statistics and Reliabilities of Study Measures (N=240)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>
Children's Perception of Inter-Parental Conflict	29.26	16.71	.92
Marital Expectations	169.64	31.76	.93
Couple Satisfaction Index	65.19	16.73	.96

**Table 3**  
*Linear Regression Analysis of Children's Perception of Inter-Parental Conflict as Predictor of Marital Expectations*

Outcome Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Marital Expectations	-.87	.10	-.49	.24	75.18	.00*

\**p* < .05

**Table 4**  
*Linear Regression Analysis of Children's Perception of Inter-Parental Conflict as Predictor of Couple Satisfaction Index*

Outcome Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Couple Satisfaction Index	-.46	.06	-.48	.23	69.66	.00*

\**p* < .05

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### **DISCUSSION**

The findings of the research pertaining to our first hypothesis reveal that perceived parental conflict explains 24% variation in the scores of marital expectations in young adults (Table 3) and the model is significant. Hence, suggesting perceived parental conflict a significant predictor of marital expectations. It is backed up with the evidence from the research conducted by Ramazzina (n.d) young adults who viewed their parent's relationship as bad had a negative perception of marriage. Rhoades (2012) showed that the degree to which the participants rated their parent's relationship conflicts represented as a healthy role for their own relationship with their partners.

Findings with regard to second hypothesis demonstrate that perceived parental conflict explains 24% variation in the scores of marital satisfaction in young adults (Table 4) and the model is significant. Hence, suggesting perceived parental conflict a significant predictor of marital satisfaction. Thus, when perceived parental conflict increases, marital satisfaction decreases but with a minor difference. According to Markland and Nelson (1993), if young adults are exposed to parental conflict, they form pessimistic marital views, which might damage their relationships later in life, as well.

In addition, Bowlby (1982) and Davies and Cummings (1994) stated that parental conflict leads to negative relationship between parent-child. Moreover, adolescents' future romantic relationships are built on observation of their parent's intimate relationship (Davies et al., 2002; Grych & Fincham, 2001; Reese-Weber & Hesson-McInnis., 2008). Hence, children who experience parental conflict learn such interpersonal behaviors, which are visible in their future relationship (Whitton et al., 2008).

In conclusion, the findings of the present study highlight the role of perceived parental conflict on marital expectation and marital satisfaction in young adults. However, the findings need to be interpreted with caution contemplating the limitations of the study. The questionnaires provided to all participants in the study were exceptionally lengthy, for participants who had just been married for a year, as compared to those married for a longer duration. Furthermore social desirability may have interfered. Their responses may have lied in the same spectrum, but the subjective content of what they felt while filling those questionnaires could not be measured. Another limitation was the broad spectrum of the age range of the participants (19-40 years). Other limitations includes that study was conducted

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through a standardized procedure and online. Researcher recommended an equal number of participants in all age categories or narrow down the age range to enhance the generalizability of the results. In addition, both married and unmarried individuals should be recruited to accurately measure the marital expectations of young unmarried adults. Lastly, researchers need to be present to ensure that the right participants fill the form and observe the non-verbal and verbal cues.

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