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PSYCHO-SOCIAL IMPACT OF MARITAL CONFLICT ON WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

The study titled “Psycho-Social Impact of Marital Conflict on Women’s Mental Health” aims to examine the psychological and social challenges experienced by women facing marital conflict. Marriage is considered a fundamental social institution that ideally provides emotional support, stability, and companionship; however, persistent marital conflict can significantly affect the mental health and overall well-being of women. The study focuses on understanding the emotional, psychological, and social consequences such as stress, anxiety, depression, social isolation, and reduced self-esteem among women. A descriptive research design was adopted to study the existing conditions without manipulation. The universe of the study includes married women experiencing marital conflict, and a total of 50 respondents were selected using purposive sampling. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire, while secondary data was gathered from books, journals, and online sources. A pilot study and pre-test were conducted to ensure the reliability and clarity of the tool. The findings indicate that marital conflict leads to significant psychological distress, emotional imbalance, and social challenges among women. The study emphasizes the need for counselling services, awareness programs, and effective support systems to enhance women’s mental health and overall well-being.

Introduction

Marriage plays a crucial role in shaping the emotional, social, and psychological life of individuals, particularly women. It is often regarded as a source of love, care, support, and stability; however, when conflicts arise frequently and remain unresolved, they can create a stressful and emotionally draining environment. John Gottman 1994 stated that unresolved conflicts and negative interactions between spouses can lead to emotional distress and marital dissatisfaction. Marital conflict refers to ongoing disagreements, misunderstandings, and tensions between spouses that may arise due to factors such as financial difficulties,

lack of communication, unmet expectations, differences in values, and interference from extended family members. Karney and Bradbury explained that marital conflict develops due to stress, individual vulnerabilities, and poor coping processes within relationships. While occasional disagreements are a normal part of married life, persistent conflict can have serious negative consequences on mental health. Women are often more vulnerable to the adverse effects of marital conflict due to societal expectations, traditional gender roles, and limited access to support systems. Deborah S. Whisman found that marital discord is strongly linked to higher levels of depression among women. In many cases, women may experience emotional neglect, lack of decision-making power, and dependency on their spouses, which further intensifies their psychological distress. Marital conflict is strongly associated with mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, emotional instability, and low self-esteem. O'Leary and Smith Slep reported that marital aggression and conflict significantly predict anxiety and depressive symptoms in women. Additionally, women facing marital problems may experience social isolation, stigma, and reduced participation in social activities, which further impacts their well-being. Proulx, Helms, and Buehler highlighted that poor marital quality is closely associated with psychological distress and reduced well-being. The impact of marital conflict extends beyond the individual and affects family functioning and interpersonal relationships. E. Mark Cummings and Patrick T. Davies emphasized that ongoing marital conflict disrupts family harmony and emotional security. Women may find it difficult to maintain healthy relationships with family members and peers, leading to a sense of loneliness and helplessness. Despite these challenges, some women adopt coping mechanisms such as seeking support from friends and family, engaging in religious or spiritual practices, or focusing on personal activities. However, the lack of professional support services often limits effective coping. This study aims to explore the psycho-social impact of marital conflict on women's mental health and to highlight the importance of timely intervention and supportive measures.

Methodology

In the present study, a descriptive research design was adopted to examine the psycho-social impact of marital conflict on women's mental health. The objectives of the study are, to study the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, to understand the nature and causes of marital conflict among the respondents, to examine the psycho-social impact of marital conflict on the mental health the respondents, to identify the major problems faced by women due to marital conflict in their personal and social life; to explore the coping mechanisms and support systems available for the respondents. The universe of the study consists of married women experiencing marital conflict in coimbatore district. A total of 50 respondents were selected using purposive sampling, as the study specifically focuses on women who are directly affected by marital conflict. Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized for the study. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire designed to gather information on psychological health, emotional well-being, social relationships, and coping strategies. Secondary data was collected from books, journals, research articles, and online sources to support the study.

For the purpose of the study, key concepts were operationally defined. Marital conflict refers to continuous disagreements and tension between spouses, while mental health refers to the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of an individual. Psycho-social impact denotes the combined effect of psychological and social factors on an individual's life. The study is limited by factors such as a small sample size, restricted geographical area, and the possibility of biased responses from participants.

Findings

The findings of the study reveal that a majority of the respondents (78.3%) are women, indicating that the data largely reflects female experiences of marital conflict. Most participants (73.9%) fall within the 20–30 age group, suggesting that marital distress is particularly prominent during early adulthood. Despite high educational attainment, with 78.3% being postgraduates, marital conflict remains prevalent, showing that education does not necessarily act as a protective factor. A significant proportion of stress is reported within the first 1–5 years of marriage, highlighting an early adjustment phase as a vulnerable period. Additionally, 69.6% of respondents are in arranged marriages, indicating that many couples may be navigating emotional bonding and compatibility after marriage. In terms of residence, 45.5% of participants are from urban areas and 36.4% from semi-urban areas, suggesting that marital stress is common across evolving socio-cultural settings. A major concern is the lack of professional help-seeking, as 95.7% have never consulted a counselor or psychiatrist. Alarming, 13.6% of respondents report thoughts of self-harm, indicating a high-risk group. Physical symptoms such as headaches are reported by 63.6% of participants, reflecting the somatic impact of stress. Although over 63% describe conflicts as rare, the psychological consequences remain significant, with 50% experiencing low self-esteem and 59.1% engaging in self-blame. Furthermore, 36.4% do not feel consistently safe during conflicts, pointing to concerns regarding emotional or physical security. Emotional instability is also evident, with 69.6% reporting mood swings and irritability. Hope for the future appears inconsistent, with only 40.9% feeling optimistic regularly, while 9.1% report never feeling hopeful, which may indicate potential depressive tendencies. Overall, the findings suggest that marital conflict has a substantial impact on the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of individuals, alongside a critical gap in mental health support utilization.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, several measures can be taken to address the psycho-social impact of marital conflict on women's mental health. There is a need to make counselling and psychotherapy services more accessible and affordable for women experiencing marital problems. Awareness programs should be conducted to educate couples about healthy communication, conflict resolution, and emotional understanding. Strengthening family support systems is essential to provide emotional and psychological support to women. Community-based support groups can play an important role in reducing social isolation and providing a platform for women to share their experiences. Government and non-governmental organizations should take

initiatives to provide mental health services, legal assistance, and financial support for women. Empowering women through education and employment opportunities can help reduce dependency and improve their confidence. Additionally, efforts should be made to reduce stigma associated with mental health and marital issues through public awareness campaigns.

Social Work Intervention

Social work intervention plays a vital role in addressing the psycho-social problems faced by women experiencing marital conflict. At the individual level, social workers provide counselling, emotional support, and guidance to help women cope with stress and improve their mental health. At the family level, interventions focus on improving communication, resolving conflicts, and strengthening relationships between spouses and family members. Social workers also work towards ensuring that the emotional needs of all family members are addressed.

At the group level, support groups are formed to provide a safe space for women to share their experiences and learn coping strategies from others facing similar challenges. At the community level, social workers conduct awareness programs to educate people about the importance of mental health, gender equality, and healthy relationships. They also work to reduce stigma and promote acceptance within the community. At the policy level, social workers advocate for women's rights, access to mental health services, and effective implementation of laws that protect women from abuse and discrimination.

Conclusion

The study concludes that marital conflict has a profound impact on the psycho-social well-being of women. It significantly affects their mental health, leading to stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional instability. Social factors such as isolation, stigma, and lack of support further aggravate their condition. Women experiencing marital conflict often struggle with low self-esteem, reduced confidence, and difficulty in maintaining relationships.

The study highlights the importance of providing timely psychological support, counselling services, and awareness programs to improve women's mental health. Strengthening family support systems and promoting gender equality are essential in reducing marital conflict and enhancing overall well-being. Addressing the psycho-social challenges faced by women is crucial not only for their individual well-being but also for the health and stability of families and society as a whole.

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