# COMPARISON OF PARENTS AND CHILDLESS COUPLES: LIFE SATISFACTION, SOCIAL SUPPORT, AND PERSONALITY TRAITS AMONG MARRIED COUPLES WITH AND WITHOUT CHILDREN.

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## ABSTRACT

*The current study compares couples with children and without children on three variables that is life satisfaction, social support and personality traits. A purposive sampling technique was used and data was collected from (N=120). The participants were divided into two groups, couples with children (N=60) and couples without children (N=60). The measurement tools were Satisfaction with life scale, Multidimensional scale for perceived social support and NEO-IP scale for personality traits. The independent t-test was used to compare the groups and Pearson correlation was also used to find out correlation. The result showed that couples with children have high level of life satisfaction and social support as compare to childless couples.The couples with children are more extroverted and narcistic and they have more open to experience as the couples without children are more agreeable.The current study revealed that having children had great impact on life satisfaction and social support of the couples, and that they have the trait of conscientiousness in common.*

***Key words:*** *Life satisfaction, Personality traits, social support, Couples with and without children.*

## 1. Introduction

This study aims to discover that life satisfaction, personality traits and social support are the variables that affect differently and comparatively to the couples with or without children. Life satisfaction reflects to the satisfaction that couples feel develops after their marriage along with their spouse in their life. Children had a great impact on couple's life satisfaction. Personality traits usually refer to the abilities and characteristics that an individual had inherently. The personality of the parents had great impact on the development of their children. Couples without children tend to be more introverted then parents. Social support reflects back up that a person had from their family, peers and society. Rearing a child or not is always supported by a family or society.

In Pakistan marriage is a union between man and woman developed by legal societies and laws. Culturally it is not only a union of man and woman but also a union of their families. In Pakistan 97% population is Muslim and they usually follow Islamic Laws (Oxford Islamic Studies).

Marriage is significantly implied in both couples and their families in a form of legal commitment. It helps couples to establish a strong relationship and also variety of relationship with family (Benkraits. 1996).

Marriage is social contract between two people recognizes legally, traditionally based on a sexual relationship and implying a permanence of the union. A group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit is called a family (Little, W. 2011).

Different societies defined family in this way that each family member had a certain role within family in which one is father, mother and their child. Family can be defined in different terms or manners that family members are grouped together in particular status roles in a strict array. A family in which a person is born is called Orientation family. The family in which person is bound in relations after marriage is called Procreation family. These issues are culturally differentiated in all over the world (Little, W. 2011).

In general, it is seen that couples who are married are expected to assist each other in different ways for example dealing with economic responsibilities, engaging in sexual activities, bearing and having children, etc. The affiliation that a family shares as a unit depends a lot on the level of satisfaction and harmony a couple shares in a marriage (Khan F &Aftab S. 2013).

Life satisfaction is an assessment of attitudes and feelings of person's own life at a specific time that ranges from negative to positive. It is the major measure of well- being: positive and negative affect on life satisfaction. (Diener, E. 1984).

## 2. Literature Review

Schult. P found in his studied that parents and childless couples reported same level of life satisfaction in their observation period from (1994- 2010). Furthermore when he studied more on parents he concluded that parents were more satisfied in their pre-parenthood life, and after they become parents they spend their leisure time in most of household and care of children. He observed that life satisfaction of parents' changes by the time and more economic burden is associated with parenthood (Sutherland, A. 2014).

Men and women experience the decline in their relationship and satisfaction differently; Mother's satisfaction drops immediately after their marriage but for father this satisfaction delayed after few months. Different physical and hormonal changes occur and more responsibilities of home and working world may describe it. Who will take care of children and their home also a conflicted question between the parents(Petersen, A. 2011).

Couples who do not have children also had decline in quality of marriage life and satisfaction after sometime. Although when baby comes they experience satisfaction in their relationship, in which the most important time period is soon after the birth of a child and his/her adjustment in the world of experience(Stanley, S. n.d).

Having not Children represents disarrangements in the person's life that they experience and what they expected to live their life for the sake of childless persons in midlife and after the mid life. Childlessness may lead to sense of loss or failures which can also lead depressive positive self view and low life satisfaction, most importantly when they compare themselves with parents, by perceiving themselves as not meeting social expectations and realizing that they are not doing the right thing that other people can do in their life (Hagested& Call. 2007).

Different researches revealed that couple experience more happiness and life satisfaction, when they express more love and affection and bulk of supportive behavior along with spousal care. Moreover, it is studied that close relationshipsupport assists more to satisfaction(Cutrona&Suhr. 1994).Partner supportive behavior leads more satisfaction in their relationship as compared with those couples who did not have supportive behavior from their partner and spouse (Acitelli&Antonucci. 1994).

Furthermore, it is also studied that perceiving great social support is important to decrease depressive symptoms also with protecting the person from negative impact of stress and life stressors. Whereas low perceived social support is not just increases the risk to depression but also it contributes to lead toward stress (Aneshensel& Stone. 1982).

Researcher uses six dimensions and areas to study the level of perceived social support from the society and family. First, they look at the support additionally provided by the spouse or partner. Second, to measure the level of perceived social support that a person has from group of people and their friends. Third, they perceive a valuable positive reinforcement from other which may lead toward self-esteem and inspired them from others. The fourth principle is that they rely on their family whenever they need their social support and they have relationship support needed from others. Fifth, the tutor and parent are present to guide and support them whenever they needed. The last principle is that to find nurturance with the society. It means the person would get some social development by raring children and providing a physical and emotional experience and care (Cutrona, Russell, & Rose. 1986).

Furthermore researches revealed that social support pretend individual and couples from stress and this social support decreases the level of depression at high level in parents and couples(Cohen & Wills. 1985).

In 1998 Saucer and Goldberg gave the concept of personality traits, five factor model (FFM) of personality traits. Itis the most useful and helpful experimentally. This model suggested that personality traits can be defined more accurately by defining them into five major dimensions.These dimensions are: extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, honestyand friendliness. Extraversion is the area of experience

to which a person is friendly and sociable versus quiet and unsociable. Neuroticism is the degree to which a person is anxious and neurotic verses steady and calm. Conscientiousness is the degree to which a person is organized and dependent on others, versus independent and unorganized. Friendliness is the extent to which a person is temperate and easily convinced, versus unfriendly and cold. Honesty is the degree to which a person is creative and likes to explore new knowledge, versus dull and thin-minded (Woods & West. 2010).

Conclusivelylife satisfaction, personality traits and social support is very much important in parents and couples who have not children. All these variables are dependent on a society's norms and rules that they have developed in decades. Life satisfaction is a variable in which having or not having child is depend on couple's own decisions.

Di Tella et al. (2003) studied that number of children present in the family determined the parent's happiness and satisfaction with their life. They studied different couples with or without children and suggested that parents are more satisfied with their life as compared to non parents.

Angels. L. (2009) investigated the relationship between life satisfaction and home life of having children. The sample was collected on yearly bases from 10,000 peoples and they concluded that effect of having child on life satisfaction is positive.

Cutrona, Russell. R. (1986) studied that the couple without children had happy relationship and satisfaction with life overall. The social support and corporal health both are very much important to deal with a relation. They studied fifty couples with or without children to discover social support in them. It was suggested that social support encourages more to raise a child.

Stice, Ragan & Randall. (2004) studied that family support is the most important part of person's life. Children expect a lot of things from their parents. Lack of social support may lead children toward depression and stress. They studied different people and concluded that optimistic reinforcement and social support from parents develop happiness in their child. They also studied that receiving social support is very important for children to become successful in their life.

Nokao, Takaishi, & Tatsuta, et al. (2000) studied the effects of family environment (parental relationship, social support) on personality traits. The result of this study shows that overprotection is negatively related with extraversion and child rearing is also associates with maternal participation. Parent's personality traits and family environment had more strong influence on children's personality. Study revealed that children of extroverted show high level of intellect.

Voorden M. D.(2014) studied the effects of parenthood on life based on Big Five personality factors. The data was collected from Parents (N=140) and couples without children (N=144) using an online questionnaire. The result of these studies shows no difference on conscientiousness, extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness and openness to experience between couples with and without children. Moreover when they focus more on parents they show low level of emotional stability in first three years after the birth of child. The studies suggested that birth of children did not affect big five personality traits in parents compared to couples without children.

Jokela et al. (2009) studied suboptimal personality factors. This study revealed that parents had increased level of neuroticism as compared to couples without children. This high level may lead to less social support and stress which may lead to difficulties raise children.

The purpose of the current study was to check life satisfaction, social support and personality traits among couples with and without children by using following hypothesis.

1. There would be high level of satisfaction in marriedcouples with children.

2. There would besignificant difference in personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism in married couples with and without children.

3. There would be high level of social support in marriedcouples with children.

## 3. Method

**Participants**

For the purpose of data gathering there was choose sample from DHQ Hospital, Sample was consisted of 120 participants. They were divided into two groups' parents and couples without children. The sample was truly representative of whole population.  The Mean age was more than fifty years and marital experience of 5 years. The exclusion criteria was couples who are newly married were not included in this research.

Research Design

The sample was collected by using non probability sampling. Purposive sampling technique was used. The participants were selected from DHQ Faisalabad.

Measures

**Satisfaction with life scale: -**

Developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985), SWLS consisted of five statements about life satisfaction. The Urdu translated version by Anila and Ismail (2005) was employed in this study. Respondents rate each item on a 7-point Likert type scale (1 =strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Total score is obtained by summing up score on each item. The minimum score is 5 and maximum score is 35. Low scores indicate less satisfaction with life and high scores indicate more satisfaction with life.

Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social support: -

The Multidimensional Scale for perceived Social support is developed by G. Zimet(1998) and Urdu translated by NidaZafar and RukhsanaKausar (2013). It is designed to measure perceived support from three sources: Significant, Family and friends. The scale is comprised of 12 items with the four items of each scale. The MSPSS has good reliability and validity.

**NEO-IP Personality Traits: -**

Personality is the combination of different traits that comprises individual's unique pattern of behavior, emotional and attitudinal responses. As every person has unique personality, it is necessary to understand their personality traits and characteristics. The Big five personality factor measurement instrument is being used as a psychometric test in a number of fields. It consists of 120 items consisting on five domains of personality. It is translated into Urdu by Ahmed and Iftikhar Khan.

**Procedure**

The tools that used in the research were identified, and permission was taken from the authors. The study was conducted in DHQ hospital. Informed consent was written and presented to all the participants and also informed them about the purpose of the research. After assuring the confidentiality the data collection was started and each participant was provided the written set of three questionnaires along with the demographic sheets. Demographic sheet was provided for the sake of taking information about age, marital experience and occupation from participants. The set of three questionnaires were taken 15 to 20 minutes for completion. All the questionnaires were filled on face to face individual in order to make completion. All the ethical considerations were taken into account. The data was collected from two groups; couples with children and couples without children. After the data was collected, the data was organized on SPSS data sheet and statistical analysis was done. The independent t-test and Pearson correlation was used to find out the difference and correlation between the research variables.

## 4. Results

**Comparing Life satisfaction:**

The couples with children were had more life satisfaction on Satisfaction with life scale (M= 32.52) as compared to Couples without children those show less life satisfaction (M= 12.75)(Table1). The Pearson correlation between these two groups was -.254 which shows that there was negative correlation between these two groups (Table 2). The independent t-test on this variable score was 25.83 that show there was significant difference in them (Table 3).

**Comparing Social Support: -**

The couples with children were perceived more social support on Multidimensional Scale for perceived social support (M= 6.2152) as compared to couples without children those perceive low social support (M=2.5347) (Table 1). The Pearson correlation between these two groups was .168 which shows that there was no correlation between these two groups (Table 2). The independent t-test on this variable score was 27.24 that show there was significant difference in them (Table 3).

**Comparing Personality traits: -**

In personality traits there were five demographics named neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. The couples with children have more significant results on trait of openness to experience, neuroticism and extraversion as compare to other traits. The couples without children have more significant results on traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness was common in both groups.

**Table: 1** showing results of life satisfaction and social support among couples with and without children.

|  |  | Life satisfaction | | Social Support | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | M | SD | M | SD |
| Couples children | with | 32.52 | 2.807 | 6.2152 | .78678 |
| Couples children | without | 12.75 | 5.219 | 2.5347 | .68971 |

**Table: 2** showing correlation of variables.

| Variables | Correlation |
|---|---|
| Life satisfaction | -.254 |
| Social support | .168 |

**Table: 3** showed the independent t-test of variables.

| Variables | t-test |
|---|---|
| Life satisfaction | 25.83 |
| Social support | 27.24 |

## 5. Discussion

The current study investigates life satisfaction, social support and personality traits among couples with and without children. In this study to test these variables different set of instruments was used and informed consent was also maintained. The participants selected for the study was married and had marital experience of more than five years. The purpose of the study was to check the life satisfaction, social support and personality traits in parents and childless couples.The present research findings can be defined in the light of norms and socio-economic status of Pakistan and its long-lasting effects on the health of the Pakistani people. The research findings concluded that in Pakistan people rated their life satisfaction at high level when they have children and show low level of satisfaction who did not have children. It is Pakistani culture to rare children after the couple gets married and they did not want to remain childless according to their own will.

The present study accepted the first hypothesis that is the couples with children have more life satisfaction because life satisfaction was determined by the family environment and children as previous studies find it. In Pakistan satisfaction with the life is depended on the socio economic status of the person as well as on the children because the people who have children strive to done something for his/her child and to give them better life.

The present study also accepted the second hypothesis that is couples with children have more social support as studied founded that parents who have more social support tend to be more optimistic and their children also perceive social support from their family. In Pakistan people live mostly in large family groups and they

want to receive support from their family and peers to live better life and to take better decisions. Furthermore when parents' rare children their social circle becomes vast and they share their feelings towards others easily.

The current study findings partially accepted the third hypothesis of the research that is there was significant difference in traits of neuroticism and extraversion but openness to experience was also had significant difference in the couples with children's personality traits as previous studies prove that parents are more extraverted and neuroticistic and current study reveal that they have also more open view of experience. Both groups have common trait of conscientiousness.

## 6. Implication of the findings

The findings of the present research can have several implications, that it can help further researchers to find out literature review and to study couples with and without children. It can also help to study Pakistani norms and traits of the people according to their culture. It can also helpful in studying personality traits of the parents and their effect on their children,

## 7. Limitations and Recommendations

Despite all the efforts to overcome the hindrances in the way of present research process, there were number of limitations.The data was collected mostly from government hospitals of Faisalabad and that it is not generalized on the whole community of the Pakistan.Furthermore the biological and genetic factors were not studied in this research and it is recommended to use them in further researches to find out their effects on childless couples.It is totally quantitative study and it is suggested to done qualitative study to find out reasons and other psychosocial factors in Pakistani context.

## 8. Conclusion

Although there were different limitations of this study, but the present research identified significant difference in life satisfaction and social support in couples with children as compare to couples without children. The parents are more extraverted and experience everything openly. This research provided a hallmark feature for further researchers to study on parents and couples without children.

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