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Breaking the mold: How challenging gender stereotypes influences marital quality

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Abstract
The study focuses on the relationship between gender stereotypes and marital quality. For this study 100 participants were selected on the basis of snow ball sampling. Where 50 were male and 50 females. Age ranging from 25-40. The scales that were used are marital quality scale by A. Shah and gender stereotype scale by Arjun Shekhar Pm & Dr. Parameswari Jaya Raman. The necessary calculations were done and the results were obtained.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes, marital quality, adults

Introduction

Traditional gender roles and expectations have a considerable impact on a couple's relationship dynamics and general satisfaction with their marriage, which is why gender stereotypes and marital quality are strongly related. Studies have indicated that those with more egalitarian views of gender roles are more likely to report having a higher quality marriage because they are more likely to participate in joint decision-making, provide emotional support, and resolve conflicts together (Beam, 2018). Widely held, simplistic beliefs about the traits, roles, and qualities of men and women are known as gender stereotypes, and they have a big influence on the happiness of relationships in general as well as romantic relationships. These preconceived notions frequently dictate how partners ought to act, speak, and split duties in a partnership.

Research has shown that adherence to traditional gender stereotypes can both positively and negatively affect relationship satisfaction, depending on the specific context and the expectations of both partners. Some key areas influenced by gender stereotypes include:

1. Division of household labor and childcare
2. Career aspirations and work-life balance
3. Emotional expression and communication styles
4. Sexual behaviors and expectations
5. Decision-making processes within the relationship

Understanding how gender stereotypes shape relationship dynamics is crucial for developing more equitable, satisfying partnerships. This topic intersects with broader social issues like gender equality, changing family structures, and evolving societal norms. Gender stereotypes are culturally constructed beliefs about the characteristics, behaviours, and roles expected of individuals based on their gender. These stereotypes can profoundly influence how men and women perceive themselves and others, especially in intimate relationships. Traditional stereotypes often portray men as dominant, assertive, and emotionally reserved, while women are seen as nurturing, passive, and more emotionally expressive. Such assumptions can create expectations that shape the dynamics between partners in romantic relationships. The Interplay between gender stereotypes and relationship satisfaction is a crucial area of study in social psychology. Relationship satisfaction refers to how content partners feel in their relationship, encompassing emotional fulfilment, communication, support, and overall well-being. When individuals adhere to rigid gender norms, it can limit their ability to

communicate openly or express vulnerability, potentially leading to frustration, misunderstandings, and dissatisfaction within relationships.

Methodology

To write this literature review, we used the data bases available on Google scholar and Google webpage. As we have observed that the divorce rate has been increasing day by day in India. We cannot help but notice that gender stereotype has a contribution to it. To explore it more we took the help of some sociology and social psychology books.

Gender Stereotypes and Marital Satisfaction: An Overview

Gender stereotypes refer to the socially constructed and culturally defined expectations associated with being male or female. These stereotypes can influence an individual's behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs, which in turn can affect their relationships and overall well-being. In the context of marriage, gender stereotypes can lead to unequal power dynamics, conflict, and dissatisfaction.

Gender Socialization

Gender socialization starts in early infancy and continues throughout adulthood, fostering certain habits and attitudes considered suitable for each gender. Children acquire concepts of "masculinity" and "femininity" via toys and language. This process may induce internal tensions when people experience pressure to adhere to society norms, often resulting in mental health challenges.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is essential for comprehending the influence of gender stereotypes on mental health. Race, financial position, and sexual orientation connect with gender, resulting in distinct experiences and obstacles. Women of color may have compounded pressures from racial and gender stereotypes, affecting their mental health distinctively compared to white women.

The Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Marital Satisfaction

Research has consistently shown that gender stereotypes can negatively impact marital satisfaction. For instance, a study found that husbands who held more traditional gender role attitudes reported lower marital satisfaction, as they were less likely to engage in emotional support and conflict resolution (National healthy resource centre). Similarly, another study found that wives who held more egalitarian gender role attitudes reported higher marital satisfaction, as they were more likely to engage in shared decision-making and emotional support (Justin Newsome, Dominican University of California).

In conclusion, gender stereotypes and marital quality are closely linked. Traditional gender roles and expectations can lead to unequal power dynamics, conflict, and dissatisfaction in marriage. On the other hand, egalitarian gender role attitudes can promote shared decision-making, emotional support, and conflict resolution, leading to higher marital satisfaction. Understanding the impact of gender stereotypes on marital quality is crucial for promoting healthy and fulfilling relationships.

Literature Review

A qualitative study was conducted in UK and Pakistan on 41 individuals to determine how spousal role expectations contribute to marital conflict and intimate partner violence (IPV). It highlights the significant impact of unmet expectations on marital conflict and IPV. Key findings revolved around two domains of expectations; providing and protecting expectations from husbands and caretaking and household managing expectations from wives. The study reveals that gender roles, cultural and societal norms shape these expectations. When these expectations are unmet or behaviours deviate from perceived norms it can lead to marital conflict and escalate to IPV (Ali et al., 2020) [5].

Marital quality is not influenced by age, numbers of family members, duration of marriage, number of children, or income. However, lower marital quality is correlated with gender role conflict. Along with family functioning and presence of psychotic problems, gender role conflict is a significant predictor of marital satisfaction (Pourshahbaz et al.,2020) [6].

A quantitative study was conducted in Bayburt and Erzurum among 639 individuals. The analysis of the study reveals a significant positive relationship between marital quality, gender roles and life satisfaction. Attitudes towards gender roles differ based on gender, spouse's employment status, and having children (Cetinkaya,2017) [7].

Leadership style and gender roles impact the management of familial conflict (MFC) and this in turn affects divorce decisions and marital satisfaction. Strategies adopted by spouses positively influences the resolution of familial conflicts. Effective conflict management improves marital quality and reduces the likelihood of divorce. Along with that men were not seen as visionary leaders in familial conflict resolution and women's competency did not significantly impact the management of familial conflict (El-Kassem et al., 2022) [4].

In another research by K Ahangar,2014[9] Measures of conflict resolution and marital quality were used to analyse the data collected from 387 participants. According to the findings, a favourable correlation exists between the settlement of conflicts and the contentment of a married couple.

On the other hand, there are certain distinctions between conflict resolution and marital counselling that might be attributed to gender roles. The conclusion that gender has a moderating impact on satisfaction was not reached as a result of the gender differences that were observed. The correlation between the settlement of conflicts and the happiness of a successful marriage.

Two experimental investigations that were carried out in the United States (N = 223) and the Netherlands (N = 269), it was discovered that when participants were exposed to role-reversed relationships, they saw the woman as the more dominating and agentic one in the relationship, while the guy was seen as the weaker one in the relationship. Additionally, they have a perception that women in role-reversed relationships are less liked, they have less regard for males in role-reversed partnerships, and they anticipate

that such relationships will be less gratifying than they will be. In addition, we discovered that both male and female partners in role-reversed relationships viewed the guy to be the weaker one and the woman to be the more dominating one. This was discovered in a third partner research that included 94 heterosexual couples. Furthermore, among role-reversed couples, a perception that the man was the weaker in the relationship was a predictor of lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Melissa Vink, 2023) [3].

In this research, the relationship between the quality of marriage and gender role stereotypes was investigated. The marriage quality, gender role identity, and gender role attitude of a group of three hundred and fifty couples between the ages of thirty and fifty were evaluated. The findings indicated a preference for the conventional pattern, since studies have shown that masculinity for men and femininity for women are related with higher levels of marital well-being. In the case of women who did not have jobs, a modern gender role attitude was shown to be strongly connected with marital quality, but this association was not seen with other groups (S. Dasgupta,2011) [10].

In another research by Yan Sun & Weiwei,2023 suggested that the act of spouses doing domestic tasks may greatly boost the level of marital quality experienced by both males and females. According to the findings, the improvement in marital q experienced by females is larger when spouses perform household chores. While male marriage contentment may be greatly improved by involvement in family decision-making, female engagement in family decision-making might have the opposite effect and decrease male marital satisfaction. However, there is no substantial correlation between male engagement in family decision-making and the level of marital pleasure experienced by women. It is true that both men and women's physical and mental health may have a major effect on the level of pleasure they experience in their marriages; nevertheless, the influence of men's physical and mental health on women's marital quality is much more significant. The findings of this research have significant practical implications for enhancing the level of marital happiness in Chinese families and fostering the development of harmonious families more generally.
Gender stereotypes have a positive link with mental health among separated persons, but not in divorced individuals, suggesting that these preconceptions paradoxically function as stabilizers in certain marital circumstances (Yujie Zhang,2024) [1].

Gender Stereotype and Mental Health Men and mental health

Conventional concepts of masculinity often emphasize emotional restraint, independence, and assertiveness. Men may feel pressured to repress feelings, resulting in heightened incidences of drug misuse, sadness, and anxiety. Studies indicate that males are less inclined to seek assistance for mental health concerns owing to stigma, which may aggravate their illness.

Female and Mental Health

Women sometimes face misconceptions that depict them as excessively emotional or caring. Such expectations might result in persistent stress and anxiety, especially when women balance different jobs (e.g., caregiver, professional). Research suggests that women are more prone to mood disorders and anxiety, partially attributable to cultural pressures and the internalization of adverse stereotypes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, gender stereotype significantly shapes marital quality, impacting communication, roles and expectations within relationships. Deviation from gender norms can lead to marital conflict and which in turn can affect marital quality (Ali et al,2020) [5]. When people adhere to traditional gender norms, they often face challenges such as misalignment in responsibilities, which can erode overall satisfaction. Some studies have revealed that marital quality was not affected by income or members but it had a connection to gender stereotypes (Pourshahbaz et al.,2020) [6]. However, relationships that actively challenge and redefine these stereotypes tend to foster greater equality and understanding, enhancing emotional connection and stability. By prioritizing open dialogue and mutual respect, couples can cultivate a healthier marital dynamic, ultimately leading to improved marital quality and resilience against societal pressures.

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