

**Parenting Style, Interpersonal Relationships, Family Support, and Marital Satisfaction
in Joint and Nuclear Families**

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ABSTRACT

Marital satisfaction is a central determinant of adult psychological well-being and family functioning, yet its developmental and relational predictors remain inadequately examined within the Pakistani context. The present study investigated the relationships among parenting styles, interpersonal relationships, family support, and marital satisfaction, and compared these variables across nuclear and joint family systems. A cross-sectional correlational design was employed with a purposive convenience sample of 200 married adults (M age = 26–33 years) recruited from Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Participants completed the Parenting Style Questionnaire (PSQ), Interpersonal Relationship Scale (IRS), Family Support Scale (FSS), and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS). Results indicated that authoritative parenting, interpersonal relationships, and family support were all significantly and positively associated with marital satisfaction, while authoritarian parenting demonstrated a significant negative association. Multiple regression analysis revealed that authoritative parenting was the only significant independent predictor of marital satisfaction, accounting for 12.4% of the variance. Comparison across family systems showed that nuclear family participants reported significantly higher interpersonal functioning and marital satisfaction than joint family participants, whereas no significant differences were observed in parenting styles or family support. Findings are interpreted within Baumrind's parenting typology, Bowlby's attachment theory, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework. Clinical implications for family-centered preventive and therapeutic interventions targeting parenting quality and interpersonal competencies in Pakistani married couples are discussed.

Keywords: Parenting styles, interpersonal relationships, family support, marital satisfaction, nuclear family, joint family, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Marriage occupies a central and deeply consequential position in the social fabric of Pakistani society, constituting not merely a contractual union between two individuals but a relational system that interconnects families, communities, and cultural identities in ways that have profound implications for the psychological well-being of the individuals involved (Olson & Gorall, 2003). Subsequently, parenting styles and how children and adolescents relate to the people around them will be the relational frameworks and attachment styles of the adult concerning how children relate to and bond with their spouses and partner relationships, especially their role as a spouse of a marriage (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Research indicates that spouse's parenting experiences and interpersonal

skills can be critical to marriage satisfaction (Gottman, 2014; Reis & Shaver, 1988; Arshad et al., 2024). Family support encompasses the perceived or experienced quality and availability of the emotional, informational, and instrumental help offered by extended family and social networks (Dunst et al., 1988; Khan & Iqbal, 2020).

Authoritative parenting is viewed as the most positive compared to the other three styles, and is positively associated with the most adaptive developmental outcomes of children in a wide variety of cultural and developmental settings (Baumrind, 1991). Research evaluating parenting styles in Pakistan find similarities and differences in comparison to the West (Akhtar & Aziz, 2021). Interpersonal relationships, broadly defined as the patterns of interaction, communication, and relational engagement that characterize an individual's social functioning with others, represent a domain of psychological functioning with direct and well-documented implications for adult marital quality (Horowitz et al., 2006). Family support refers to the perceived availability and helpfulness of assistance from a range of informal and formal sources within the family and community networks of individuals and couples (Dunst et al., 1988). The present study uses the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale, developed by Fowers and Olson (Olson, 2000; Fowers & Olson, 1993).

The present study is theoretically grounded in Baumrind's parenting typology, Bowlby's attachment theory, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and is integrated within a lifespan developmental framework that conceptualizes marital satisfaction as the outcome of a complex interplay among developmental, interpersonal, and contextual factors (Baumrind, 1991; Bowlby, 1988).

Rationale of the Study

While each of the variables – parenting styles, interpersonal functioning, family support, and marital satisfaction – has been documented in a variety of Western and South Asian cases, a systematic examination of the variables within an integrated correlational framework has yet to be done among the adult married Pakistani population (Akhtar & Aziz, 2021; Rafiq et al., 2022). The current study has theoretical, empirical, and practical implications, making it significant on multiple levels (Doss et al., 2022; Zaman et al., 2026).

Operational Definitions

Parenting Styles

These dimensions are measured using the Parenting Style Questionnaire (PSQ).

Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are operationally defined as an individual's capacity and tendency to engage in open, competent, and functional social interactions with others, including dimensions of self-disclosure, conflict management, emotional responsiveness, and emotional regulation. This construct is measured using the Interpersonal Relationship Scale (IRS) (Raja et al., 2024).

Family Support

Family support is operationally defined as the perceived availability and helpfulness of assistance, both formal and informal, from a range of social sources including parents, relatives, spouse's family, friends, community groups, and professional helpers, in supporting the respondent's family and parenting responsibilities (Gulbahar et al., 2023). This construct is measured using the Family Support Scale (FSS).

Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction is operationally defined as the subjective appraisal of overall happiness, fulfillment, and positive affect within one's marital relationship, including satisfaction with communication, conflict resolution, role responsibilities, financial management, leisure time, affection, parenting, and values alignment (Rabbani & Sarmad 2018). This construct is measured using the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS), which includes the Marital Satisfaction (EMS_MS) and Idealistic Distortion (EMS_ID) subscales.

Nuclear Family

A nuclear family is operationally defined as a household unit consisting of a couple and their children only, without coresidence of extended family members such as parents, siblings, or relatives (Rahaman et al., 2026).

Joint Family

A joint family is operationally defined as a household unit in which a couple and their children cohabit with extended family members, typically including parents-in-law and other relatives, sharing household responsibilities and resources (Parveen et al., 2019).

Conceptual Framework of the Study

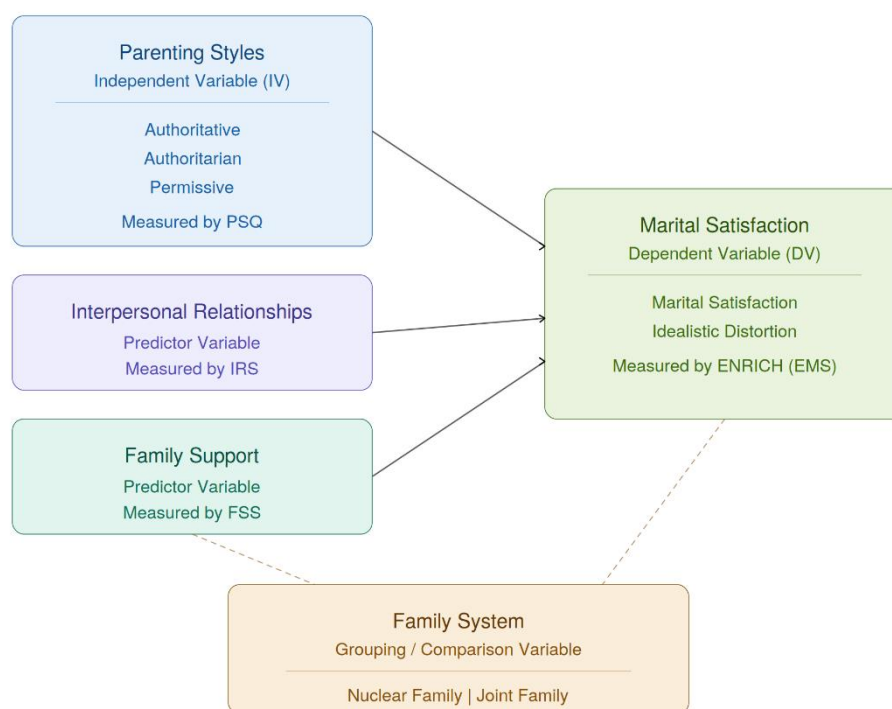


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework of the Study*

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework guiding the present study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consequently, parenting that is described to be authoritarian, (high control, low warmth, and punitive) or permissive (high warmth and low expectations) resulted in negative outcomes for children

(Baumrind, 1991; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Adult relationship satisfaction tends to be lower among those who had parents that were cold, punitive, or inconsistent (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Authoritarian parenting, a more common parenting style used in rural and lower socioeconomic Pakistani populations, is associated with higher levels of anxiety, lower levels of self-efficacy, and lower levels of social functioning (Akhtar & Aziz, 2021; Siddiqui & Karim, 2024). On the contrary, couples who communicate in a hostile manner and who are emotionally withdrawn, exhibit destructive conflict escalation and poor emotional regulation, find marital satisfaction to be declining and experience a marital breakdown (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Johnson, 2004; Sharafat et al., 2025). Research conducted in Pakistan on marital satisfaction and interpersonal functioning has identified similarities in findings with those from the West; however, it has also pointed out culturally specific moderators and mechanisms (Ahmad et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023)

The family support scholarship demonstrated that couples who perceive high supports from extended family network composition, such as parents, in-laws, siblings, and friends, report more marital satisfaction, coping effectively with marital stressors, and greater relationship stability (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cutrona, 1996; Shehzad et al., 2024). For married couples in Pakistan, the extent and type of support from their family members is significantly determined by the family's living arrangements (Khan & Iqbal, 2020; Zafar & Hamid, 2021). Nuclear and joint family systems are of great importance in South Asian family structures and have social consequences for marriage and family (Ali & Hassan, 2022; Zafar & Hamid, 2021). A few studies showed evidence of higher marital satisfaction among nuclear-family couples in Pakistani urban populations (Rafiq et al., 2022; Hussain & Pervez, 2023). The experience and implications of joint and nuclear family living should be examined through a gender lens (Bokhorst et al., 2022; Zafar & Hamid, 2021).

Literature from the three frameworks points to a consistent picture. Authoritative parenting aligns with better parenting outcomes, higher satisfaction and quality of social support network, and better marital functioning (Rafiq et al., 2022; Khan & Iqbal, 2020).

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive), interpersonal relationships, family support, and marital satisfaction among married individuals.
2. To investigate whether parenting styles significantly predict marital satisfaction among participants.
3. To determine whether significant differences exist in parenting styles, interpersonal relationships, family support, and marital satisfaction between nuclear and joint family participants.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant relationship between parenting styles, interpersonal relationships, family support, and marital satisfaction.
2. Parenting styles will significantly predict marital satisfaction among participants.
3. There will be significant differences in parenting styles, interpersonal relationships, family support, and marital satisfaction between nuclear and joint family systems.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design (Elfil & Negida, 2017).

Research Setting

Data were collected from married adults residing in Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Participants were recruited through community settings, including residential areas, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities, with the goal of obtaining a sample that reflected the demographic diversity of the Faisalabad adult married population in terms of age, socioeconomic status, family structure, and residential area.

Population

The target population comprised married adults residing in Faisalabad district, Punjab, Pakistan, including both urban and rural residents.

Sample and Sampling Strategy

A total of N = 200 married adults were recruited using purposive convenience sampling from Faisalabad district. The final sample comprised 102 nuclear family participants and 98 joint family participants, with 87 male and 113 female participants (Elfil & Negida, 2017).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

Currently married at the time of data collection. Aged 18 years or above. Residing in Faisalabad district at the time of data collection. Able to read and understand the English-language questionnaires or Urdu translations independently or with minimal assistance. Willing to participate voluntarily and provide written informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria

Currently separated or in the process of divorce, given that marital satisfaction measures may not be applicable to couples no longer cohabiting or actively engaged in marital functioning. Submitted questionnaires with more than 10% missing item responses.

Procedure

Data was collected over several weeks after receiving ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Riphah International University Faisalabad Campus. If a questionnaire was found to be more than 10% unanswered, it was omitted from the analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

The study followed the American Psychological Association (APA) ethical standards and Riphah International University Faisalabad Campus research ethics regulations (APA, 2020).

Statistical Analysis Plan

All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (v. 25)(Cohen, 1988; Hayes, 2018).

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants (N = 200)

Variables	Categories	f	%
Gender	Male	87	43.5%
	Female	113	56.5%
Age	18–25 years	30	15.0%
	26–33 years	88	44.0%
	34–41 years	71	35.5%
	42–49 years	11	5.5%
Marital Status	Married	167	83.5%
	Divorced/Widow	33	16.5%
Family System	Nuclear	102	51.0%
	Joint	98	49.0%
Residential Area	Rural	81	40.5%
	Urban	119	59.5%
Total Family Members	Two	12	6.0%
	3 to 5	63	31.5%
	6 to 8	52	26.0%
	More than 8	73	36.5%
Earning Members	One	51	25.5%
	Two	69	34.5%

	Three	45	22.5%
	More than Three	35	17.5%
Socioeconomic Status	Lower Class	51	25.5%
	Middle Class	115	57.5%
	Upper Class	34	17.0%

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 200 participants included in the study. Females constituted a slight majority (n = 113, 56.5%) compared to males (n = 87, 43.5%). The largest age group was 26–33 years (n = 88, 44.0%), followed by 34–41 years (n = 71, 35.5%), reflecting that the majority of participants were adults in their mid-reproductive and parenting years. Regarding marital status, most participants were married (n = 167, 83.5%), while 16.5% were divorced or widowed (n = 33). The sample was nearly equally distributed between nuclear (n = 102, 51.0%) and joint (n = 98, 49.0%) family systems. A slight majority resided in urban areas (n = 119, 59.5%). Most households had more than eight total family members (n = 73, 36.5%), and two earning members was the most common financial arrangement (n = 69, 34.5%). The middle socioeconomic class constituted the largest SES group (n = 115, 57.5%).

Table 2: Psychometric Properties of Study Scales

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Items	α
PSQ_ATV	200	26.00	72.00	53.47	9.63	15	.91
PSQ_ATN	200	12.00	49.00	25.36	7.99	12	.93
PSQ_PER	200	5.00	17.00	9.70	2.72	5	.76
IRS	200	56.00	149.00	105.98	16.81	32	.93
FSS	200	23.00	81.00	54.66	10.86	18	.91
EMS	200	22.00	75.00	56.80	10.13	15	.94
EMS_MS	200	15.00	50.00	37.79	6.90	10	.92
EMS_ID	200	7.00	25.00	19.01	3.52	5	.84

Note. PSQ_ATV = Authoritative Parenting; PSQ_ATN = Authoritarian Parenting; PSQ_PER = Permissive Parenting; IRS = Interpersonal Relationship Scale; FSS = Family Support Scale; EMS = ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale; EMS_MS = Marital Satisfaction subscale; EMS_ID = Idealistic Distortion subscale.

Table 2 reveals that all scales and subscales demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency, confirming their reliability for further statistical analyses. The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale yielded the highest reliability ($\alpha = .94$), followed by the Interpersonal Relationship Scale ($\alpha = .93$) and the Authoritarian Parenting subscale ($\alpha = .93$). The Marital Satisfaction subscale ($\alpha = .922$) and the Family Support Scale ($\alpha = .91$) also exhibited excellent reliability, while the Authoritative Parenting subscale ($\alpha = .91$) and Idealistic Distortion subscale ($\alpha = .84$) demonstrated strong internal consistency. The Permissive Parenting subscale produced an acceptable reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .76$), consistent with prior literature reporting moderate alpha values for shorter parenting subscales. Mean scores indicate moderate levels of authoritative parenting, family support, and marital satisfaction, with comparatively lower scores on authoritarian and permissive parenting styles.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis among Parenting Styles, Interpersonal Relationships, Family Support, and Marital Satisfaction

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. PSQ_ATV	1							
2. PSQ_ATN	-.36**	1						
3. PSQ_PER	-.17*	.17*	1					
4. IRS	.36**	-.18**	-.11	1				
5. FSS	.35**	-.15*	-.10	.37**	1			
6. EMS	.34**	-.16*	-.06	.56**	.45**	1		
7. EMS_MS	.34**	-.17*	-.08	.56**	.46**	.98**	1	
8. EMS_ID	.32**	-.13*	-.03	.50**	.41**	.94**	.87**	1

Note. **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed). PSQ_ATV = Authoritative Parenting; PSQ_ATN = Authoritarian Parenting; PSQ_PER = Permissive Parenting; IRS = Interpersonal Relationship Scale; FSS = Family Support Scale; EMS = ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale; EMS_MS = Marital Satisfaction subscale; EMS_ID = Idealistic Distortion subscale.

Pearson correlation analysis supported Hypothesis 1. Authoritative parenting demonstrated significant positive correlations with interpersonal relationships ($r = .365$, $p < .01$), family support ($r = .35$, $p < .01$), overall marital satisfaction ($r = .34$, $p < .01$), the marital satisfaction subscale ($r = .34$, $p < .01$), and the idealistic distortion subscale ($r = .32$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher authoritative parenting is associated with better relational functioning and greater marital satisfaction. Authoritarian parenting showed significant negative correlations with interpersonal relationships ($r = -.18$, $p < .01$), family support ($r = -.15$, $p < .05$), overall marital satisfaction ($r = -.16$, $p < .05$), the marital satisfaction subscale ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$), and the idealistic distortion subscale ($r = -.13$, $p < .05$), suggesting that greater authoritarian parenting is linked to poorer relational and marital outcomes.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis: Parenting Styles Predicting Marital Satisfaction (N = 200)

Variables	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	39.750	5.989	—	6.637	.000
PSQ_ATV	.34	.076	.331	4.585	.000
PSQ_ATN	-.06	.092	-.049	-.678	.499
PSQ_PER	.000	.255	.000	.001	.999
R ²	.12				
F	3,197				

p < .001.

Note. PSQ_ATV = Authoritative Parenting; PSQ_ATN = Authoritarian Parenting; PSQ_PER = Permissive Parenting. Dependent variable: EMS (Marital Satisfaction).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether parenting styles predict marital satisfaction. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(3, 19) = 9.22$, $p < .001$, explaining 12.4% of the variance in marital satisfaction ($R^2 = .124$). Among the three parenting styles, authoritative parenting emerged as the only significant positive predictor of marital satisfaction ($\beta = .33$, $p < .00$), indicating that parents who employ a more authoritative parenting style report higher levels of marital satisfaction.

Table 5: Differences in Study Variables by Family System (Nuclear vs. Joint)

Variables	Nuclear (n = 102)		Joint (n = 98)		Cohens					
	M	SD	M	SD	t	df	p	LL	UL	d
PSQ_ATV	52.39	9.68	54.59	9.50	-1.621	198	.107	-4.88	.48	-0.23
PSQ_ATN	25.56	8.59	25.15	7.35	.358	198	.721	-1.83	2.64	0.05
PSQ_PER	9.82	2.71	9.57	2.74	.654	198	.514	-.51	1.01	0.09
IRS	108.73	14.84	103.12	18.28	2.384	198	.018	.97	10.24	0.34
FSS	53.75	10.92	55.61	10.77	-1.217	198	.225	-4.89	1.16	-0.17
EMS	58.84	9.52	54.67	10.36	2.966	198	.003	1.40	6.94	0.42
EMS_MS	39.09	6.44	36.44	7.12	2.761	198	.006	.76	4.54	0.39

EMS_ID	19.75	3.34	18.23	3.55	3.117	198	.002	.56	2.48	0.44
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Note. LL = Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit of 95% Confidence Interval. Cohen's *d* values: small = 0.20, medium = 0.50, large = 0.80. PSQ_ATV = Authoritative Parenting; PSQ_ATN = Authoritarian Parenting; PSQ_PER = Permissive Parenting; IRS = Interpersonal Relationship Scale; FSS = Family Support Scale; EMS = ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale; EMS_MS = Marital Satisfaction subscale; EMS_ID = Idealistic Distortion subscale.

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences between nuclear and joint family participants across all study variables, providing partial support for Hypothesis 3. No significant differences were found on parenting style dimensions — authoritative parenting ($t = -1.62, p = .10, d = -0.23$), authoritarian parenting ($t = .35, p = .72, d = 0.05$), and permissive parenting ($t = .65, p = .51, d = 0.09$) — indicating that family system type does not significantly influence reported parenting practices, with negligible effect sizes across all three subscales.

However, significant differences with small-to-moderate effect sizes emerged for interpersonal relationships and marital satisfaction. These findings suggest that individuals residing in nuclear family systems report greater interpersonal functioning and higher marital satisfaction, while holding more idealized perceptions of their marital relationships compared to those in joint family systems.

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The present study investigated the relationships and differences among parenting styles, interpersonal relationships, family support, and marital satisfaction in a sample of 200 in nuclear and joint families from Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Collectively, the findings provided full support for Hypothesis 1, partial support for Hypothesis 2, and partial support for Hypothesis 3, yielding a theoretically coherent pattern of results with implications for family and marital psychology research and practice in the Pakistani context.

Hypothesis 1 proposed significant correlations between the four variables. Authoritative parenting had significantly positive correlations with all of these criterion variables (Akhtar & Aziz 2021; Rafiq, Rafiq, etc. 2022). The documented negative associations between both authoritarian style of parenting and interpersonal functioning, family support, and marital satisfaction confirm both theoretical notions and previous research (Hussain and Pervez, 2023; Al Lawati et al., 2024). An interesting observation in this study is the lack of significant correlations between permissive parenting and the criterion variables (Baumrind, 1991; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). The strong positive association of interpersonal functioning and marital satisfaction ($r = .560, p < .01$) is one of the study's most informative findings, as it validates existing research, which posits that the quality of communication, conflict management, and emotional responsiveness in a marriage is incomplete without considering interpersonal functioning (Gottman, 2014; Johnson, 2004). The data indicates a significant positive relationship between family support and marital satisfaction ($r = .459, p < .01$) in the Pakistani marital context, likely due to family and social networks providing practical and emotional resources (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Khan & Iqbal, 2020; Hamid 2025).

Hypothesis 2 states that styles of parenting would predict levels of marital satisfaction. This hypothesis was partially confirmed due to the overall regression model being statistically significant, explaining a large amount of variance in satisfaction levels of marriage, where $R^2 = .124, F = 9.228, p < .001$. Out of the three forms of parenting, the only predictor was authoritative parenting ($\beta = .331, p < .001$), while the other two, authoritarian and permissive parenting, were not statistically significant (Baumrind, 1991; Akhtar & Aziz, 2021).

Hypothesis 3 indicated substantial differences in parenting styles, interpersonal relationships, family support, and marital satisfaction due to the differences in nuclear versus joint families. This hypothesis was partially confirmed, as the differences in family structure were present for interpersonal functioning and marital satisfaction but not for parenting styles and family support (Khan & Iqbal, 2020; Zafar & Hamid, 2021). The lack of marked contrasts among nuclear and joint family participants regarding parenting styles is a conceptually valuable null finding. It indicates that parenting styles do not vary in accordance with family structure (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The lack of a significant difference in family support among nuclear vs joint family participants may seem strange at first (Dunst et al., 1988; Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Implications

First, the study broadened the cross-cultural relevance of Baumrind's parenting categorization and the associated developmental consequences, indicating that the links with authoritative parenting and adaptive relational functioning transcend the developmental continuum and impact the adult marital satisfaction in a Pakistani cultural setting that is notably different from the Western populations in which this theoretical framework was developed and validated. Second, the quality of interpersonal functioning was shown to be similar to a global correlate of marital satisfaction among Pakistani adults, in reference to Western research. Third, the present findings support the ecological systems theory by identifying family structural context, distinguished here as the nuclear-versus-joint family living dichotomy, as a meaningful moderator of interpersonal functioning and marital satisfaction of adults in Pakistan; small-to-moderate nuclear-joint differences in interpersonal functioning and marital satisfaction support the theoretical assertion that family structure is a pivotal microsystemic variable that influences the relational ecology in which marriage partners interact and where marital relationships come into being and evolve. These findings suggest that introducing family-oriented, early, and preventive interventions aimed at improving the quality of parenting with the expectation and desire that such interventions will enhance family satisfaction is a useful approach.

Limitations

The current investigation does have methodological constraints, which, understandably, affect how outcomes are analyzed and generalized. Using non-probability sampling methods limits our understanding of the research population and thus constrains the generalizability of the research to the population of married adults in Faisalabad/Pakistan.

Recommendations

Future research should employ longitudinal designs that track parenting experiences, interpersonal functioning, and marital satisfaction over time to establish the temporal ordering of the theorized developmental pathways and to examine the stability and change of parenting style associations with marital quality across different marital stages. Future research should also investigate potential moderating variables that may strengthen or weaken the associations among parenting styles, interpersonal functioning, family support, and marital satisfaction, enabling more precise identification of the conditions under which these developmental associations are most pronounced.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationships among parenting styles, interpersonal relationships, family support, and marital satisfaction in 200 married adults from Faisalabad, Pakistan, and investigated differences in these variables between nuclear and joint family systems. Nuclear family participants reported significantly higher interpersonal functioning and marital satisfaction than joint family participants, with small-to-moderate effect sizes, while no significant differences emerged for parenting styles or family support.

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