

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF WIDOWED AND STILL-MARRIED MIDDLE AGED INDIVIDUALS

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE

To assess the psychological well-being of widowed and still-married middle aged individuals in terms of positive functioning and negative condition as depression.

STUDY DESIGN

Matched group design.

PLACE AND DURATION OF THE STUDY

The sample was selected from different cities of Punjab, Pakistan. The data were collected during March to June, 2015.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The sample comprised of 200 participants; among them, 100 were widowed (50 men & 50 women) and 100 were still-married (50 men & 50 women). Ryff Scale of Psychological Well-being, Satisfaction with Life Scale, and Beck Depression Inventory were used to measure the variables under study.

RESULTS

Two way MANOVA was used to analyze the data. Significant differences appeared between widowed and still-married individuals on the measures of psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

Results highlighted that widowhood negatively affected the psychological well-being. However, there is no significant difference on the well-being in terms of gender.

KEY WORDS

Widowhood, Psychological well-being, Life satisfaction, Depression

INTRODUCTION

The combination of satisfaction and happiness are used as synonym for psychological wellbeing and termed as subjective well-being¹. For the past many years, well-being had been restricted to only the measurement of positive and negative affect². The second primary conception, which has gained prominence in mid 70s and early 80s among sociologists, was the emphasis on life satisfaction as the key indicator of well-being. Viewed as a cognitive component, life satisfaction was seen to complement happiness, the more affective dimension of positive functioning³. Overall life satisfaction and domain-specific questions about job, income, and interpersonal relationships are considered as estimates of well-being¹.

The union of various frameworks of positive functioning served as the theoretical foundation to generate a multidimensional model of well-being⁴. Distressing life events for instance, chronic illness, calamities, separation, retirements, and widowhood etc. have negative impact on the psychological well-being of the victims. The termination or disruption of the marriage due to the death of husband or wife causes a great pain or emotional stress. According to the studies, widowhood is a significant distressing or painful event, especially in middle age⁵. Researches have reported lower psychological well-being among widowed as compared with still-married⁶. Lubben⁷, not only reported higher psychological well-being among still-married individuals, but also found significant positive impact of higher income status on psychological well-being. Bennet⁸ conducted a study to examine the psychological well-being in the context of marital status, which also included widows. Age, and gender analyses showed that age was significant factor but gender was not. The study found increased age in widowhood was associated with lower psychological well-being.

Loss of a spouse has been reported as one of the primary causes of depression among widowed. Studies reported higher level of depression among widowed as compared with married people. Grootheest et al.⁹ and Ye¹⁰ found that widowed reported significantly higher level of depression than still-married. Sasson and Umberson¹¹ studied the depression after widowhood and found that widowed reported higher depression as compared with still-married and early widowhood had bad impact on depression of both widows and widowers.

Dupuis and Smale¹² studied the relationship between psychological well-being and depression in changed marital status (widowed) and found changed marital status is associated with low level of psychological well-being and high level of depression among middle age and old age adults. Ansari¹³ studied the psychological well-being of widowed and found that people after changed marital status reported lower level of mental well-being and higher level of depression and they were less satisfied with

their lives. Psychological well-being of widowed was positively associated with satisfaction with life and negatively associated with level of depression.

The aim of the present study was to understand well-being in terms of positive functioning (psychological well being) and negative functioning (depression) in the context of widowhood. Studies on the relationship of individual facets of psychological well-being and depression are relatively few, especially in the population of middle aged widowed, and were mainly conducted in the West, while in Pakistan, the relevant published studies are scarce. The objective of present study was the assessment of the facets of psychological well-being of widowed and still-married individuals including; eudaimonic well-being (autonomy, purpose in life, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, personal growth and self-acceptance), evaluative well-being (general satisfaction with life), and affective well-being (depressive symptoms). The study hypothesized the following;

H1: There will be significant difference in the psychological well-being of widowed and still-married individuals

H2: The significant magnitude of difference in psychological well-being in terms of marital status (widowed and still-married) will depend on gender.

H3: Eudemonic and evaluative well-being will predict affective well-being.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

Participants

The sample consisted of 200 middle age participants. Age of the participants ranged between 45 and 54 years. Among them 100 participants were widowed (50 men & 50 women), with mean age = 48.87 and SD = 7.07. Men's mean age = 50 and SD = 7.234 and women's mean age = 46.74 and SD = 6.845. The sample of 100 still-married participants (50 men & 50 women) of similar age group with mean age = 47.80 and SD=6.07. Men's mean age = 52.74 and SD = 6.72 and women's mean age = 45.86, and SD = 5.233. The sample was collected from rural and urban areas of the Punjab, Pakistan, with varying education levels (matric to post graduation) and professions, living in joint and nuclear families. Purposive sampling technique was used to approach the sample. The individuals whose spouses had died and they did not married again were termed as widowed, and the individuals who were living with their spouse were termed as still-married. Divorced and separated couples, and individuals with any chronic disease, and who married after the death of spouse were not included in the study.

Measures

*Ryff Scale of Psychological well-Being*⁴

This scale measures the eudaimonic well-being. Urdu version of the scale comprised of 54 item¹³ was used. It is theoretically-grounded instrument which measures six dimension of psychological well-being given in the model. Each dimension has 9 items which spilt into equal numbers of positive and negative items. Items are scored on a

6-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree and negative items have reversed scoring. Internal consistency coefficients (alpha) for Ryff's scale range from .84 to .91 in the present study.

*Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)*¹⁴

Satisfaction with Life Scale was used to measure the evaluative well-being of our sample. The 5 items SWLS measures the global cognitive judgment of life satisfaction. The SWLS can be used with different age groups. The alpha reliability of the scale was .92 in the present study.

*Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)*¹⁵

BDI is a 21 item instrument which measures the severity of depression in adolescents and adults. BDI is one of the most widely accepted instruments in the field of psychiatry for assessing the intensity of depression, and for detecting possible depression in normal population¹⁵. The score ranges from 0 to 63. Higher score indicates severity of depression. The alpha reliability was .82 in the present study.

Procedure

After the approval of topic from GC University Lahore and the translation of SWLS and BDI in Urdu by following forward and backward translation method, data collection was started. Researcher visited different rural and urban areas of Punjab, Pakistan and went from door to door with personal references to get the questionnaires filled. Some people refused to share their personal information, but most of the people who were contacted were comfortable in sharing their information. The participants were ensured that their identity will not be revealed. 260 people were contacted, 36 refused and 14 forms were found incomplete in many dimension, hence data of 200 participants were analyzed. More than 100 participants did not report their annual income, that's why analysis in terms of socio economic status was not run.

RESULTS

Inter-correlations among the study variables were calculated by Pearson's correlation as a pre-requisite for MANOVA and regression analysis. Table 1 showed that the variables of the study have significant correlations with each other, which supports to use MANOVA and regression analysis. Table 2 showed that there were significant differences on the three facets of psychological well-being between widowed and still-married. Cohen's d illustrated that still-married showed higher mean score on positive functioning (i.e., Ryff's Scale of Psychological well-being and satisfaction with life) and lower mean score on negative functioning (depression) as compared with widowed.

Table 1
Inter-correlations among the Study Variables(N=200)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Psychological well-being	---	.40*	-.42*
2. Satisfaction with Life	---	---	-.27*
3. Depression	---	---	---

Note: *p<.01

Table 2
Differences between Widowed and Still-Married on Psychological Well-being, Satisfaction with Life and Depression (N=200.)

Variables	Df	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)	t	Cohen'sd	Effect Size(r)
		Still-married	Widowed			
Ryff's PWB	198	212.85(19.95)	199.64(21.42)	4.52*	.64	.30
SWL	198	25.12 (6.09)	16.09 (8.16)	8.89*	1.26	.53
DEP	198	12.47(8.16)	22.20(8.02)	6.75*	-.95	.43

Note: *p<.01. PWB = Ryff's psychological well-being, SWL=satisfaction with life and DEP= depression.

Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations of the widowed and still-married individuals on Ryff's psychological well-being, satisfaction with life and depression in terms of gender difference. In order to assess the statistical differences between three facets of

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics on Study Variables (N=200)

Variables		Men	Women
		Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)
Subjective Well-being	Married	211.54 (22.43)	214.20 (17.25)
	Widowed	197.04 (23.03)	202.18 (19.58)
Satisfaction with Life	Married	24.62 (6.04)	25.62 (6.04)
	Widowed	23.02 (5.95)	23.20 (6.81)
Depression	Married	13.06 (9.16)	12.42 (7.19)
	Widowed	19.82 (7.29)	20.58 (8.74)

Table 4
Group Differences between Widowed and Still-married Individuals on Ryff's Psychological Well-being, Satisfaction with Life and Depression in Terms of Gender (N=200)

Sources	Dependent Variables	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Gender	Subjective well-being	760.50	1	760.50	1.77	.184	.009
	Satisfaction with Life	17.40	1	17.40	.449	.504	.002
	Depression	.180	1	.180	.003	.959	.000
Marital status	Subjective well-being	8791.38	1	8791.38	20.51	.000	.095
	Satisfaction with Life	202.00	1	202.00	5.21	.024	.026
	Depression	2782.58	1	2782.58	41.93	.000	.176
Gender* Marital status	Subjective well-being	76.88	1	76.88	.179	.672	.001
	Satisfaction with Life	8.40	1	8.40	.217	.642	.001
	Depression	24.50	1	24.50	.369	.544	.002
Error	Subjective well-being	84011.72	196	428.63			
	Satisfaction with Life	7596.54	196	38.75			
	Depression	13004.56	196	66.35			
Total	Subjective well-being	8600628.00	200				
	Satisfaction with Life	124131.00	200				
	Depression	70064.00	200				

well-being (Ryff PWB, satisfaction with life, and depression) of widowed and still-married in terms of gender, two way MANOVA was run. Results showed that marital status (i.e., being still-married and widowed) has significant main effect on all dependent variables $F(1, 196) = 20.51, p < .01, \eta^2 = .09$; $F(1, 196) = 5.21, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$; $F(1, 196) = 41.93, p < .01, \eta^2 = .18$ consecutively for Ryff PWB, satisfaction with life, and depression. However, there is no significant main effect of gender and interaction effect of gender and marital status on the dependent variables; Ryff PWB, satisfaction with life, and depression (see table 4). In order to test the predictive strength of eudaimonic and evaluative well-being in affective facet of well-being, stepwise regression analysis was done. Results showed that 21% variance in depression is accounted for by environmental mastery, purpose in life and life satisfaction of individuals. Our model is best fit as $F(3, 196) = 17.62, p < .01$ (see table 5 & 6).

Table 5
Multivariate Test of significance

Variables	Values	Sig	η^2
Gender	.011	.551	.011
Marital Status	.245	.000	.197
Gender* Marital Status	.006	.764	.006

Table 6
Predicting Depression from Sub-Scales of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being and Life Satisfaction (N=200)

Variables	B	SE	β	t	p
EM	-.296	.073	-.291**	-4.03	.000
PL	-.329	.107	-.202**	-3.07	.002
LS	-.206	.099	-.145*	-2.07	.039
R ² =	.21				

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01. EM= Environmental Mastery, PL= Purpose in Life, LS= Life Satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The study was designed to assess the differences in the three facets of psychological well-being between widowed and still-married individuals living in Pakistan. The results show that marital status significantly determined the difference in all three facets of psychological well-being. Our results are in line with the research carried out in the West^{6,8} that supports the notion that widowhood had adverse effect on the well-being of widows and widowers. Widows have been reported to be more depressed than still-married individuals^{10, 11}. As the satisfaction with life concerns, marital status also determined the level of satisfaction and widows in different parts of the world are reported to be lesser satisfied with their life circumstance than still-married individuals¹⁶.

The results also showed that gender did not had any significant impact on the psychological well-being of widows and widowers. The results coincide with the earlier studies^{11,17}.

Stepwise regression showed that depression in our sample was significantly predicted by environmental mastery, purpose in life, and life satisfaction. Our results were partially in line with Dupuis and Smale¹² who found strong association of changed marital status with low level of psychological well-being and high level of depression among middle age and old age adults. Results are consistent with the past studies^{18,19} that eudaimonic well-being predicted depression among widowed. Environmental mastery (EM) appeared as the most salient predictor of depression in the study. Knight et al.²⁰ showed that 49% of the variance in depression was accounted for by the self-reported level of environmental mastery among three other variables (viz., functional capacity, self-evaluated physical health, bereavement experiences). The results illustrated that when a person after the death of spouse developed a sense of effectiveness in mastering circumstances and socio economic challenges and changes, s/he would be optimistic and see the brighter side of picture, which would ensure mental health.

Purpose in life (PL) appeared as a second significant predictor of depression in our sample. Negative effect of loss of purpose in life in mental health has been supported by Chan²¹. People who can find meaning in negative experiences, usually cope better with the situation, in comparison to those that cannot find meaning or purpose and demonstrate better mental health and well-being²². The prime motive of human behavior is to strive for finding meaning and a reason for his/her limited and often "confusing" existence. Meaning of life is a vibrant component that gives coherence to the person's world view and a critical factor for his/her psychological and spiritual well-being. According to Frankl "life has meaning under all circumstances and that it is psychologically damaging when a person's search for meaning is hindered. If someone does not struggle to find meaning in his/her life, then ultimately s/he will lose his/her psychological well-being"²³.

Life satisfaction appeared as a third significant predictor of depression among our sample. Low life satisfaction indicates higher risk of adverse physical and mental health outcomes. Negative association of life satisfaction in prediction of depression has been supported by Ansari²⁴. It exhibits that when widowed individuals feel less satisfied with their transformed life, this evaluation leads to the onset of depressive symptoms.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study should be interpreted with caution as it contains certain limitation:

- The sample size was small and was collected from one province of Pakistan. In future studies, representation from all provinces is recommended
- We assessed the difference in the PWB of widowed, and did not find the specific problem that widowed were facing in our society. A mixed method study in future will help to understand the problems of widowed in the indigenous perspective.
- Role of socio economic status could not be determined in the psychological well-being of widowed due to under reporting of annual income by the participant. In future it should be emphasized
- Another important issue that research could not address is how and through which mechanism environmental mastery, purpose in life, and satisfaction with life come to influence the depressive

symptomatology. For example, according to some studies purpose in life seems to have a direct influence on health, psychological adjustment and well-being²⁴; whereas, according to others it acts as a mediator²⁵. So mediation and moderation studies may also be planned.

- Finally, an issue that comes up and hasn't yet been understood is why some people tend to feel more mastery, seek more for meaning, and are more satisfied, especially in difficult situations, while others do not. It is possible that some temperament characteristics or personality traits predispose some persons for mastery, meaning in life and greater satisfaction, which, however, have not been studied yet.

CONCLUSION

The present study suggests that no matters, widows are male or female, there is no significant difference in all three facets of psychological well-being. Widowhood had similar adverse effect on their well-being. Furthermore, due to a good fit of model with the present data, the model is consistent with the theory of psychological well-being (two factor model) and indicates that widow's depression was predicted by environmental mastery, purpose in life, and life satisfaction. Better liaison is required between psychologists and family members to let them aware about the changing needs and demands for psychological health of the widowed. The study has implications in terms of policy formulations, family as well as community based care of widowed who are vulnerable to depression.

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