

A Comparative Study of Resilience and Rejection Sensitivity among Working and Non-Working Married Women

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to compare the areas of Resilience and Rejection sensitivity in working and non-working married female population of District Haripur and Abbottabad. The study used a quantitative cross-sectional survey design and convenience sampling was used for the selection of the respondents. The total number of married women in the study was 300 that includes 151 employed women and 149 who were not employed, ranging in ages from 25 years to above 50 years. The Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008) and the Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (Downey & Feldman, 1996) were both used in the administration of two well-established psychological instruments. Independent sample t-tests showed that women who were employed were more resilient and less rejection sensitive than those who were not. A Pearson correlation also yielded a significant negative correlation between the two variables with the women who had higher scores on the resilience category having lower scores on the rejection sensitivity category. The results further indicate that there is a protective psychological effect of occupational involvement for married women. The results have further implications for psychologists, counsellors and policymakers as it highlights the need for resilience building interventions and supportive work and family environments to improve the psychological health of married women.

Keywords: Resilience, Rejection Sensitivity, Working Women, Non-Working Women, Married Women, Haripur, Abbottabad.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, women have to shoulder a lot of social duties, have jobs, and have their own expectations. Their psychological health is influenced by a range of social and environmental factors as they become more and more involved in the dual role of work and family. One such factor that has come to the fore is employment because working in a variety of interpersonal and professional settings has a significant influence on how women manage stress and interact with others (Kaul & Matta, 2024). Women working at home, on the other hand, may have relatively limited social support networks, affecting how they experience their emotions and how sensitive they are towards noticing interpersonal cues (Pardesh & Noida, 2020). The differences indicate that having a job could positively impact on women's psychological resources and emotional adaptation, as well as on their ability to cope with interpersonal relationships.

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Another dimension is given to women's psychological lives through marriage, especially in cultures where the role of the mother/female and the role of the husband/ male are highly valued. The demands of marriage, the role of the homemaker, the role of the mother and father, and the role of the child can have a profound impact on women's emotional adjustment and interpersonal functioning. While for employed women, balancing both roles simultaneously can boost their psychological coping mechanisms or impose additional stress, depending on the situation (Xue, 2021). A number of scientific studies have begun to appreciate the fact that psychological functioning in women is closely related to their role, to their situation in society, to their environment, in such a way that it is not unworthy of scientific study to compare the psychological functioning of working and non-working married women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Resilience and rejection sensitivity are psychologically related constructs. Resilience is the capacity to recover from adversity and to adapt positively to stress (Smith et al., 2008), while rejection sensitivity is characterized by a heightened expectation, experience, and reaction to interpersonal rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Resilient people tend to manage their emotions more effectively and to deal with interpersonal issues better, which reduces their risk for experiencing rejection. In contrast, less resilience can make one more vulnerable to emotion and enhance rejection sensitivity. From a theoretical perspective, this relationship is useful for better understanding potential protective role of resilience against maladaptive interpersonal responses among married women.

In an effort to understand rejection sensitivity and its link to romantic relationship functioning, Mishra and Allen (2024) studied rejection sensitivity across cultures. In their comparative, quantitative study they found significant differences in rejection sensitivity among population groups and found that interpersonal sensitivity is not a stable personality trait but is instead influenced by cultural and social context.

Indrastuti & Herawati (2023) examined the coping strategies and psychological resilience of married working mothers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. They employed structured questionnaires which revealed that for women with multiple roles, psychological resources in the family and personal sphere more than compensated, suggesting that successful handling of complex life roles could enhance psychological resources, not just cause an increase in stress.

Ammara & Jameel (2022) examined the relationship between rejection sensitivity and fear of being unmarried among married females as moderating variables, social support. They found that there is a great deal of variation in individual rejection sensitivity and that social relationships can serve as a buffer against emotional vulnerability.

Bhambri and Sharma (2015) made a comparative study of Indian married working women and married non-working women with respect to resilience and mental health. Their findings suggested that people who were employed responded with greater overall resilience, suggesting that employment may lead to positive adaptive coping by increasing autonomy, confidence and social engagement.

A comparison of psychological hardiness and resilience among employed and unemployed female house heads was made by Koolae (2012). Women who were working consistently had

higher resilience scores, the author explained, citing the confidence and autonomy that work can instill in them.

London et al. (2012) examined how women's academic self-silencing is related to gender-based rejection sensitivity. They also found that women's psychological vulnerabilities, such as their tendency to voice their own opinions less than others in evaluative contexts were significant correlates of rejection sensitivity.

While there has been an increasing amount of research that focuses on resilience and rejection sensitivity, most of the studies have focused on adolescents, general adult populations, or clinical populations. Married women, particularly those that can be compared according to their work status in similar cultures, are still under-researched. The particular issues that married women experience when they have to balance domestic duties, familial roles and, in some instances, professional duties have been neglected in the realm of psychological resilience and rejection sensitivity. The gap is particularly significant in Pakistan, where entrenched gender norms and social expectations have a significant impact on women's everyday lives and their ability to adapt. Haripur and Abbottabad were chosen due to their shared cultural and social traits and both districts showed a rise in the educational and employment options for women. A detailed analysis of married women from these areas gives a sense of the relationship between employment and resilience/rejection sensitivity in the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's sociocultural framework.

This study was thus aimed to fill this gap, and to explore the issue of resilience and rejection sensitivity among married women with and without working status in Abbottabad and District Haripur. The study aims to produce locally relevant results that could be applied to psychological theory and mental health practice of women in various work situations.

Objectives

The following objectives guided the present study:

1. To assess the level of resilience and rejection sensitivity among working and non-working married women.
2. To examine the relationship and differences between the level of resilience and rejection sensitivity among the total sample of married women.

Hypothesis

H1: There will be a significant difference in the level of resilience and rejection sensitivity between working and non-working married women.

H2: There will be a significant negative correlation between resilience and rejection sensitivity among working and non-working married women.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A comparative correlational design was used in this study to examine the differences between resilience and rejection sensitivity in working and non-working married women. The

relationships between variables and the group differences were of interest. The data collection approach of this study was quantitative and cross-sectional conducted at one time.

Sample

There was 100 percent voluntary participation. Finally, a total of 300 married women participated, 151 ($n = 151$) of whom were employed and 149 ($n = 149$) were not employed. The women were recruited from the District Haripur and Abbottabad using convenience sampling technique and included all kinds of profession such as teacher, lawyer, doctor and housewife. The age range of participants was from 25 years to 50 years and above. Convenience sampling made it easier to get the participants in a limited amount of time and money, but it might not necessarily be representative of the wider population of married women.

Inclusion Criteria

The study was conducted on all the married women of the age 25 years or more, who were both non-employed or employed and living in Abbottabad and District Haripur. Voluntary informed consent was a requirement for participation.

Exclusion Criteria

Unmarried women, divorced women or widows were not included. Also, incomplete questionnaires and nonparticipants were not included in the final sample.

Instruments

1. Demographics sheet

The population of my research is the demographics which are age, education, employment status, socioeconomic status and residential area.

2. Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

The Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008) was used to evaluate resilience. There are 6 items that are scored on a 5-point Likert scale from strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (5). The scores are cumulative and higher scores indicate higher levels of resilience. In previous studies, the scale has been shown to have good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha values range between .80 and .91). The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) in this present study was .958.

3. Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (A-RSQ)

A questionnaire that gauges the degree of rejection sensitivity in adults. Rejection sensitivity was assessed with the Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (Downey & Feldman, 1998) that included nine scenarios depicting interpersonal situations. Responses are rated on a 6-point scale, with higher scores indicating higher rejection sensitivity. Questionnaire has been proven to be reliable with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .76 to .83. The current sample's reliability coefficient is .935.

Procedure

The formal approval of the research topic was followed by the beginning of data collection. The researcher was given an authorization letter from the Department of Psychology which verified the researcher's institutional status and ensured that the study was being carried out as a requirement for the Bachelor of Psychology program. Personal approach was done at their workplaces and in the local community in Districts Haripur and Abbottabad respectively.

Prior to administering the questionnaire, the purpose of the study was explained to them and only those who gave their consent spontaneously were asked to participate. All potential subjects were briefed on the study before any data was collected. All participants had informed consent. Volunteers made it clear that their participation was voluntary and confidential. Following completion of questionnaires, a short debriefing session was conducted. All the way through, ethical issues were carefully taken care of so that participants' anonymity would be ensured. All data were then key-entered and analysed using SPSS version 27.

Ethical Considerations

The research is carried out which is in line with ethical standards of human research. The Department of Psychology granted permission prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained and confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation throughout the study.

Statistical Analysis

The data have been analyzed in SPSS Version 27. All of the study variables were subjected to descriptive statistics. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare married women who work and those who do not with regard to resilience and rejection sensitivity, and a Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to determine the correlation between resilience and rejection sensitivity. The assumption of normal distribution, independence of observations, homogeneity of variances (t-test) and linearity (Pearson correlation) were assessed prior to the analyses and were considered valid.

RESULTS

Table 1

Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of Working and Non-working Married Women on Brief Resilience Scale and Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire

Variables	Working Married Females M	Working Married Females SD	Non-Working Married Females M	Non-Working Married Females SD	t (298)	p	Cohen's d
Brief Resilience scale	3.67	.98	2.41	1.01	10.89	< .001	1.26
Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire	76.81	32.37	190.56	51.14	-23.06	< .001	-2.7

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, p = level of significance. *p < .001

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and t-test results for both groups on the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) and the Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (A-RSQ). Employed married women obtained a notably higher mean score on the BRS ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.98$) compared to their non-employed counterparts ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.01$), and this difference was statistically significant, $t(298) = 10.89$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.26$). On the A-RSQ, employed married women scored considerably lower ($M = 76.81$, $SD = 32.37$) than non-employed married women ($M = 190.56$, $SD = 51.14$), a difference that was also statistically significant, $t(298) = -23.06$, $p < .001$, with a very large effect size (Cohen's $d = -2.7$). Taken together, these results suggest that employment is associated with greater psychological resilience and reduced rejection sensitivity in married women.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation for Study Variables

Variables	N	Mean	SD	1	Adult Rejection Sensitivity
Brief Resilience Scale	300	3.05	1.17	—	-.434**

Note. N = number of cases, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation. ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation between the study variables across the full sample ($N = 300$). The analysis revealed a statistically significant inverse relationship between resilience and rejection sensitivity ($r = -.434$, $p < .01$), meaning that participants who scored higher on resilience tended to report lower rejection sensitivity. This pattern supports the second hypothesis, and accordingly, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The overall objective of this study was to compare resilience and rejection sensitivity in employed married women and non-employed married women and to explore the relationship between resilience and rejection sensitivity. For the purposes of this study, resilience is defined as an individual's ability to bounce back and adjust to challenging life circumstances or to negative life events (Smith et al., 2008). Rejection sensitivity, in contrast, refers to a cognitive-affective pattern involving both an anticipatory and an early detection and strong response to the threat of rejection by others (Downey & Feldman, 1996).

The internal consistency of measures was assessed to validate the reliability of the measures used. Brief Resilience Scale and Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire had high internal reliabilities (Cronbach's $\alpha = .958$ and $.935$, respectively). The overall sample of 300 women was fairly balanced between employed ($n = 151$) and non-employed ($n = 149$) groups, allowing for meaningful comparisons. An independent samples t-test, and a Pearson correlation were conducted as statistical analyses.

The first hypothesis predicted that there would be a large group difference in terms of resilience and rejection sensitivity between the working and non-working married women. This prediction was supported by the t-test results: the women who worked had higher resiliences, whereas the women who were not employed had higher rejection sensitivity. The results of this study are similar to previous studies. Indeed, Koolae (2012) reported that women with jobs in

female headed households were more resilient than those without jobs, due to the autonomy and coping that is gained by being employed. Professional involvement also was found to be associated with higher resilience and psychological adjustment among women by Gupta and Srivastava (2021). Concerning rejection sensitivity, Andrews et al. (2022) found that the level of rejection sensitivity was related to social interaction restriction, which is consistent with the limited amount of external social interaction among the non-working women. In addition, Nowland et al. (2018) found that loneliness, which may affect people who have fewer social connections within the workplace, significantly increases rejection sensitivity.

The findings may also be interpreted in the light of the sociocultural environment in Pakistan where married ladies are involved in heavy domestic and family duties. Employment can offer women social, economic, and political power and access to beneficial social networks and relationships, which can enhance their resilience and decrease their risk of interpersonal rejection. Non-working married women, on the other hand, might have far fewer opportunities to get involved in the outside world other than the family and therefore rely more heavily on close interpersonal relationships for emotional support and feeling rejected. Part of the reason for the differences between the two groups may be related to these sociocultural factors.

However, these differences could not just relate to employment. There are other factors which can also affect resilience and rejection sensitivity, including education, socioeconomic status, family support, personality traits, and quality of the marital relationship. Thus, findings should be interpreted as associations rather than as direct effects of employment on resilience and/or rejection sensitivity.

The second hypothesis suggested that across the entire sample, resilience would be inversely related to rejection sensitivity. This was confirmed by correlation analysis which found a significant negative correlation ($r = -.434$, $p < .01$). This implies that more resilient women are less likely to view interpersonal situations in terms of expected rejection. The same inverse relationship was observed in a clinical sample by Hajra and Khan (2020) and by Sachaan and Vogelee (2016) in whom higher resilience predicted lower rejection sensitivity over time. The current results also indicate that resilience acts as a protective psychological resource, helping married women to manage their emotional reactions when dealing with interpersonal stressors better. However, due to the cross-sectional study design, it is not possible to conclude the direction of this relationship, and longitudinal studies are required to identify the direction of the relationship between rejection sensitivity and resilience over time.

Limitations

Several limitations need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings of the present study.

1. First, the results might not be broadly applicable to the general population of married women, because of convenience sampling.
2. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the design rules out conclusions on causal effects of being more or less resilient on rejection sensitivity.
3. Third, data were gathered with the use of self-reports, which can be socially desirable or be subject to response biases.

4. Fourth, the study was conducted among married female residents of Haripur and Abbottabad districts; thus the results might not reflect the situation of women in other parts of the country and other cultures in Pakistan.

5. Lastly, while employment status was the most important grouping variable, other potentially important factors, including education, socioeconomic status, length of marriage, and family support, were not explored in depth and may have affected the patterns of association found.

These factors should be taken into account in future research and the use of longitudinal or probability sampling design should be used to gain a fuller picture of resilience and rejection sensitivity among married women.

Implications

I. Psychologists and counselors may draw on these findings to develop resilience-enhancement programs tailored specifically to the needs of married women.

II. Mental health practitioners can design cognitive-behavioral interventions aimed at reducing rejection sensitivity, particularly among women who may have limited social engagement.

III. Community-based awareness campaigns focused on emotional regulation, coping strategies, and psychological health could meaningfully improve adjustment outcomes for women.

IV. Schools and workplaces may use these findings to create supportive environments and implement mental health resources for women navigating multiple roles.

V. Family therapy services could incorporate resilience-building techniques to strengthen marital relationships and reduce interpersonal sensitivity between partners.

VI. Policy bodies and organizations may apply these findings to advance women's empowerment and promote initiatives that address gender-based mental health needs.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how resilience and rejection sensitivity differ between married women who are employed and those who are not, and to establish whether these two constructs are related to each other. The findings consistently showed that employed married women possessed greater resilience and lower rejection sensitivity than non-employed married women. Furthermore, a significant inverse association between the two constructs was confirmed across the full sample, indicating that stronger resilience is reliably accompanied by reduced sensitivity to interpersonal rejection. These results have meaningful implications for understanding how occupational engagement and psychological strengths interact in the lives of married women, particularly within Pakistani cultural contexts.

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