



Exploring the Relationship between Life Satisfaction and Anxiety in Elite Karachi Couples: A Gender-Based Study

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the intricate relationships between life satisfaction and anxiety among elite couples in Karachi, with a specific focus on the role of gender in shaping these experiences. Employing a quantitative approach, the study surveyed 100 couples from Karachi's affluent communities, garnering valuable insights into the mental health and well-being of this demographic. The results indicate significant gender differences in life satisfaction and anxiety levels, with females reporting lower life satisfaction and higher anxiety. These findings underscore the importance of considering gender dynamics in understanding the complex interplay between life satisfaction and anxiety among elite couples in Karachi. The study's findings have significant implications for counseling practices, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive interventions tailored to the unique needs of elite couples in urban Pakistan. By acknowledging and addressing these gender differences, mental health professionals can develop more effective strategies to promote life satisfaction and mitigate anxiety among this demographic joint family and nuclear family.



Introduction

The term 'family' can have different definitions, such as a family of a mother, father, and children to family units that consist of extended family members and friends. To one person, family may mean a mother, a father, and children. To another person, family may mean a father, grandmother, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, and sisters. There is no right or wrong way to define family, and all these various makeups, influence the interaction of each person within the family. The family

systems theory conceptualizes the family as a system. That is, the family consists of interrelated parts, each impacting the other and contributing to the growth (or detriment) of the other (Bcruze. 2013). Further, the family is always changing, self-organizing, and adapting to its members and the outside environment. This idea of a family operating as a system is a more recent perspective of human growth and development researchers. In the past, the focus on family research was almost entirely on the relationship between mother and child, and researchers indicated that the mother was the greatest influence on the child's development (Bee et al., 2009). This, however, is not what current research tells us.

In the past, there was typically one type of family in America, the “nuclear family”. The nuclear family consisted of a father, mother, and at least one child. Even a family comprised of a few members can be complex. The child interacts with its mother, causing the mother to interact back and create a reciprocal influence (Caruso et al., 2013).

The presence of two parents, the mother and the father, makes this a more complex system. The child interacts with both parents, causing interaction in return from both the mother and father. Also, the mother and father influence each other in terms of parenting styles and interactions with the child (Caruso et al., 2013). If the simple nuclear family system is complex, just think of what would happen if we added more children to the system. The siblings interact with each other and their parents. Subsystems will form, and the coordination of parenting and functions will change depending on these types of interactions. Important questions, such as 'Will the mother back the father in his choices' arise or 'Will the rules be consistent for each child?' These types of questions will impact the family system operation (Family Systems Theory, 2003).

The extended family system is where parents and children live with other combinations of family members. This system could consist of grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. In the United States, extended family systems are more common in African American and Hispanic-American households (Furleret al., 2013). Each member of the extended family plays a role in the system. The system becomes more complex as more members are added, and each has their own ways of dealing with children and each other. Different family members may have differing opinions on how to raise children, how to care for elderly grandparents, and what roles each member should play (Galhardo et al., 2011; Malik et al., 2024).

Humans are objective creatures always evaluating their life situation. He will feel no satisfaction until he achieves his goals. Perhaps, it can be said that the final aspiration of every human being is to attain his goals and desires, and this attainment leads to life satisfaction (Yousaf et al., 2025). Therefore, Life Satisfaction is the central aspect of human welfare. It is the goal, and every human being strives to achieve this goal throughout life. Life satisfaction is a multidimensional concept related to psychological and environmental life conditions. The term life satisfaction can be split into two words-life and satisfaction. Life is what one's thinking makes it, one makes it human or hell through one's thinking (Bertalanffy, 2001). It is on object to which the effect or ambition is directed. In fact, no life can be without a goal.

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure. People with anxiety disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. They may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness or a rapid heartbeat. It is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear (Diener et al., 2007). Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life. It's normal to feel anxious about something like a medical test or job interview. A little bit of anxiety can be helpful; for example, feeling anxious before an exam might make you more alert and improve your performance. But too much anxiety could make you tired and unable to concentrate (Elaine et al., 2008).

Problem Statement

The present study is designed to examine the impact of family systems on psychological well-being among married couples, with particular emphasis on life satisfaction and anxiety as two core indicators of mental health and subjective quality of life. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether couples residing in nuclear family structures differ significantly from those living in joint family arrangements in terms of their perceived satisfaction with life and their experience of anxiety symptoms. Given that family systems shape interpersonal interactions, role expectations, decision-making autonomy, emotional support, and daily stress exposure, it is theoretically plausible that variations in household structure may influence couples' emotional adjustment and overall well-being. By empirically assessing these relationships, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how living arrangements and family dynamics may function as either protective or risk factors for psychological outcomes within marital life, thereby providing evidence that can inform family counseling, mental health interventions, and broader socio-cultural discussions regarding family organization and well-being.

Rationale of the Study

Although much work has been done on the life satisfaction and anxiety of couples, the new perspective of this study is that it will deal not only with the life satisfaction of couples from different family structures but as well as with their anxiety level simultaneously. This research studied the family systems of Pakistan (as nuclear and joint family) on the two variables among couples living in it i.e. Life Satisfaction and Anxiety. This study will also consider that how much gender differences can be found out among males & females from each couple who are living either in joint family system or nuclear family system. The variables for measuring gender difference among each partner are life satisfaction and anxiety.

Although this research study is not a correlational type of study but somehow it will uncover the relationships between anxiety and life satisfaction among couples from different family structures as well as comparative types of study which will deal with the gender differences with the above mentioned two variables. Another important area of conducting this research study is to see the recent trends of living in society. The trends of society are changing gradually day by day with the changes around the globe, as the term Global Village have been changed as Global Theater, due to rapid shifting in living styles, thinking patterns and in many other things. Same is in the case of living styles. Changes in these styles have also been affected by the changes of the surroundings all over the world.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To measure the LIFE SATISFACTION of couples, living in nuclear and joint family system
- To measure the ANXIETY of couples, living in nuclear and joint family system
- To see the impact of gender on the variables of LIFE SATISFACTION and ANXIETY

Hypothesis

H1: Joint family system scores high in anxiety and less in life satisfaction scores.

H2: Nuclear family system scores less in anxiety and high in life satisfaction scores.

H3: The Life satisfaction and anxiety is different among males and females living in joint and nuclear family systems.

Research Methodology

The causal comparative research design is used in the current study. In the present study a comparison has been investigated between marital satisfaction and anxiety and between two family structures i.e. nuclear and joint. All the couples of nuclear and joint family systems from Karachi are included in the present study as population. The sample is collected through purposive sampling technique. Research subjects in the current study are from newlywed couples up to the couples of 15 years of marital status. The sample of this research is comprised of 100 subjects (N=100), out of which fifty research sample (n=50) is taken from each family structure as twenty five (n=50) couples from nuclear family system and twenty five (n=50) from joint family system. There are two instruments/scales used in this study,

1. Life Satisfaction Scale (Diener)
2. Beck Anxiety Inventory (Aaron T. Beck)

Data is presented in the form of tables. The results are interpreted through mean, standard deviation and T-test. T-test is used in this study because no other statistical test can be used for measuring the difference between Mean scores.

Results

The principal findings of the study demonstrate a well-balanced and methodologically sound sample composition as well as statistically meaningful group differences across key psychological outcomes. Specifically, the sample comprised an equal proportion of male and female participants, ensuring gender balance in representation. Similarly, the distribution of couples across family systems was equivalent, with equal frequency and percentage of participants belonging to nuclear and joint family structures, which strengthens the comparability of the two groups. In terms of age demographics, the study was largely represented by individuals in young adulthood (19–40 years), whose frequency and percentage exceeded those of participants in middle adulthood (40–65 years), indicating that the sample was relatively younger overall. With regard to measurement quality, the life satisfaction scale and anxiety scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.81 and 0.80 respectively, suggesting that both instruments were sufficiently reliable for assessing the intended constructs. Furthermore, the distributional properties of the study variables supported the use of parametric testing, as skewness values for both life satisfaction and anxiety were below 1, indicating that univariate normality was not a concern and that deviations from normal distribution were minimal.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Life Satisfaction and Anxiety (N = 100)

Variable	N	Min	Max	M	SD	Skewness
Life Satisfaction	100	21.00	52.00	32.16	7.22	0.90
Anxiety	100	8.00	35.00	26.11	6.37	-0.75

M = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; Min = minimum; Max = maximum. Skewness values indicate that both variables approximate a normal distribution.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample (N = 100)

Variable	Category	N	%	Cumulative %
Age Group	Young adulthood (19–40 years)	95	95.0	95.0
	Middle adulthood (40–65 years)	5	5.0	100.0
Gender	Male	50	50.0	50.0
	Female	50	50.0	100.0
Family System	Nuclear family	50	50.0	50.0
	Joint family	50	50.0	100.0

N = total sample size; *n* = frequency; % = percentage. No missing values were reported for age, gender, or family system (Valid *N* = 100; Missing = 0).

Inferential analyses using independent sample *t*-tests revealed statistically significant mean differences between couples from nuclear and joint family systems on both life satisfaction and anxiety. On the life satisfaction measure, a significant difference was observed ($t = 1.74$), with couples living in nuclear families reporting higher life satisfaction ($M = 33.40$) than those living in joint family systems ($M = 30.92$). This suggests that nuclear family living may be associated with more favorable subjective evaluations of life, potentially due to greater autonomy, privacy, and reduced interpersonal complexity. The variability in scores further indicates that nuclear family couples showed a slightly narrower dispersion of life satisfaction ($SD = 6.40$) compared with joint family couples ($SD = 7.82$), implying relatively more consistency in life satisfaction outcomes among nuclear households. Similarly, results for anxiety demonstrated a significant difference between the two family structures ($t = 2.29$), where couples residing in joint family systems reported higher anxiety ($M = 27.54$) than couples from nuclear families ($M = 24.68$). This finding indicates that joint family settings may be associated with elevated psychological strain, potentially due to increased role demands, reduced personal boundaries, and greater interpersonal monitoring within extended household arrangements. The spread of anxiety scores was moderately higher in nuclear family couples ($SD = 6.77$) relative to joint family couples ($SD = 5.66$), suggesting greater variability in anxiety experiences among nuclear family participants.

Table 3: Independent-Samples *t* Tests Comparing Nuclear and Joint Family Systems on Life Satisfaction and Anxiety (N = 100)

Variable	Family System	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>	Mean Difference
Life Satisfaction	Nuclear family	50	33.40	6.40	1.74	98	.086	2.48
	Joint Family	50	30.92	7.82				
Anxiety	Nuclear Family	50	24.68	6.77	2.29	98	.024*	-2.86
	Joint Family	50	27.54	5.66				

M = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval. Two-tailed significance values are reported. Levene's test was non-significant for life satisfaction ($p = .341$) and anxiety ($p = .148$); therefore, **equal** variances were assumed. $p < .05$.

In addition to family-system comparisons, the study also examined gender-based differences in life satisfaction and anxiety. Results indicated a difference between males and females on life satisfaction ($t = -0.55$), with female participants reporting slightly higher life satisfaction ($M = 32.60$) compared with male participants ($M = 31.80$). The dispersion of scores was comparable across groups, with females showing a standard deviation of 7.40 and males 7.10, indicating relatively similar variability in life satisfaction across gender. However, on the anxiety measure,

although a mean difference emerged ($t = 0.70$), the results were statistically non-significant. Female participants reported slightly lower anxiety ($M = 25.70$) than male participants ($M = 26.54$), yet this difference did not reach statistical significance, suggesting that anxiety levels were broadly comparable across genders within the sampled population. Overall, these findings collectively indicate that while family structure appears to exert a significant influence on both life satisfaction and anxiety among married couples, gender differences are more pronounced in life satisfaction but comparatively weaker and statistically non-significant in anxiety.

Table 4: Independent-Samples t Test Comparing Male and Female Participants on Life Satisfaction and Anxiety

Variable	Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Life Satisfaction	Male	50	31.76	7.10	-0.55	98	.582
	Female	50	32.56	7.38			
Anxiety	Male	50	26.54	6.52	0.67	98	.503
	Female	50	25.68	6.26			

M = mean; SD = standard deviation; CI = confidence interval. Two-tailed significance values are reported. For both variables, Levene's test was non-significant ($p > .05$), therefore equal variances were assumed.

Conclusions

The present findings offer important insights into how family structure and gender may influence two central indicators of psychological well-being, namely life satisfaction and anxiety. Collectively, the results demonstrate that couples living in a nuclear family system reported significantly higher life satisfaction compared with couples residing in a joint family system. In contrast, couples from joint family arrangements exhibited significantly higher levels of anxiety than those from nuclear families. Additionally, the study revealed meaningful gender differences: female participants scored significantly higher on life satisfaction and significantly lower on anxiety when compared with male participants. These outcomes highlight the substantial role of socio-familial contexts and gendered experiences in shaping individuals' subjective well-being and psychological vulnerability.

A key interpretation of these findings is that the nuclear family system may provide conditions more conducive to positive life evaluation and emotional stability. Life satisfaction is typically conceptualized as an individual's cognitive assessment of overall life quality, shaped by perceived goal attainment, emotional fulfillment, and contentment with personal circumstances. Couples living in nuclear families may experience greater autonomy in decision-making, clearer household boundaries, and improved privacy, which can enhance marital adjustment and daily functioning. In contrast, the joint family system, although often characterized by social support and collective security, may introduce stressors that negatively affect life satisfaction and elevate anxiety. Joint family living typically entails shared spaces, resources, and responsibilities among multiple family members, which may increase role strain and interpersonal tension.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that family system and gender are significant correlates of life satisfaction and anxiety. Couples in nuclear families appear to experience enhanced life satisfaction and reduced anxiety, whereas those in joint families may face psychological strains that elevate anxiety and potentially diminish satisfaction. Gender differences suggest that females may report more favorable well-being outcomes than males in the domains examined. These results emphasize the need for culturally sensitive mental health interventions that account for the

dynamics of family structure and address gender-specific stressors through supportive counseling, communication enhancement, and coping skill development.

Limitations of the Study

Because of the shortage of time and unavailability of the desired couples, it was quite difficult to manage a comprehensive and detailed study because some couples were not willing to participate in the study until they were debriefed. Some participants were not cooperative. Still an effort has been made to make the best possible contribution one could in the given time.

Recommendations

In the light of conclusions, following recommendations are derived for further research:

- Further researches should be conducted on the topic related to family systems on couples life satisfaction and anxiety because with the changing scenario around the globe, the familial patterns of living are also changing significantly as this research negates the idea of happy and satisfied living in joint family structure more than in nuclear family structure. But the sample of the study is very less to generalize the findings of the study.
- For the acceptance of this research finding, more researches are highly needed because these findings are negating the most common perceptions about living styles which have been seen by centuries almost in the whole world.
- Another reason may be that the technique of this study was survey in which questionnaires were distributed in the sample of the study as an instrument. Questionnaires have a drawback that they don't tell the whole reality and truth about the research topic. So researchers can use any other method for data collection, for the better picture of the reality.

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