



Examining Marriage Anxiety, Psychological Distress and Social Support among Adults of Separated and Non-Separated Families

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the levels of marriage anxiety, psychological distress, and social support among young adults from separated and non-separated families. A cross-sectional survey method was employed, involving a sample of 200 individuals, comprising 110 individuals from separated families and 90 individuals from non-separated families. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from individuals, age ranging from 18-35 years ($M = 21.64$, $SD = 1.43$). Urdu version of Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales and Pre-Marital Anxiety Scale were used. Correlation analyses revealed significant relationships among the study variables. Social support was negatively correlated with psychological distress and marriage anxiety, while psychological distress and marriage anxiety were positively correlated. All correlations were statistically significant. Independent sample *t*-tests showed that individuals from non-separated families had higher social support, while those from separated families experienced higher psychological distress and marriage anxiety. These findings underscore the impact of family structure on young adults' psychological well-being and social support, highlighting the need for targeted support for those from separated families.



Introduction

Entering a marital union is, for many, one of the most important decisions in life and a step into adulthood. There is a large and growing body of research that strives to explore the marital

adjustment which is one of crucial aspects of family and individual life. Marital relation is one of the most frequently studied phenomena in the field of family and relationships (Ward et al., 2009). Continued importance is placed upon the quality of marital relationship due to its impact on individual and family wellbeing (Stack & Eshleman, 1998). Married people are least likely to have mental disorders (Williams et al., 1997), and have higher levels of emotional and psychological well-being than those who are single, divorced, or cohabiting (Brown, 2003). But many factors contribute to develop anxiety in marriage relation.

Marriage anxiety, pertains to the feelings of worry, fear or apprehension that may be experienced by a person or partners when thinking of getting married, or preparing for a marriage. This anxiety can be influenced by various individual and social factors, impacting the emotional state and interaction patterns of those involved (Johnson, 2023). In more explicit terms, Janda and Hamel (2013) define the construct of marriage anxiety as the emotional stress and equivocality experienced by individuals regarding the likely transition into a marital bond. These feelings can stem from self-uncertainty, fear of commitment or from social standards pressuring individuals to commit to a particular type of lifestyle. In a similar way, Levine (2017) explains that marriage anxiety refers to the general concern regarding the changes and representative responsibilities that are implied by the marital bonds, including the concerns about the potential loss of freedom or experiencing marital conflict. When people are anxious about marriage, they might worry about things like making the right choice, fearing commitment, or concerns about the future. The concept of marriage anxiety refers to the understanding and fear related to entering or maintaining a marital relationship. Early studies in the 1980s and 1990s explored the transmission of relationship patterns from parents to children. For instance, Amato and Keith (1991) conducted meta-analyses showing that children of divorced parents often had more negative attitudes towards marriage and evidence higher levels of marriage anxiety. These findings were attributed to the modeling of impaired relationship behaviors and the loss of a stable family structure.

Psychological Distress (PD) is extensively characterized as a condition of profound experiencing described by side effects of sadness (e.g., loss of interest; depression; urgency) and nervousness (e.g., irritability; feeling tense). It is additionally described by other physical side effects like; a sleeping disorder, cerebral pains, and absence of energy that are probably going to shift across various regions (Horwitz, 2002). One definition of psychological distress is provided by Drapeau and colleagues in 2012, who describe it as "a set of painful mental and physical symptom that are associated with normal fluctuations of mood in most individuals". These symptoms can range from feelings of sadness and hopelessness to physical manifestations such as fatigue and sleep disturbances.

Early psychological theories, such as Freud's psychoanalytic theory, suggested that delay in family dynamics could lead to increased psychological distress (Freud, 1920). Resultant empirical studies in the 1970s and 1980s reinforced this notion, showing that children from separated families were at a higher risk of experiencing psychological distress due to factors such as economic hardship, parental conflict, and reduced social support (Hetherington, 1979).

The impact of family structure on psychological outcomes has been a topic of research since the mid-20th century. Early studies primarily focused on the consequences of divorce and parental separation on children. Researchers such as Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) conducted pioneering longitudinal studies that highlighted the immediate and long-term psychological effects of parental separation. Their findings indicated that children from divorced families exhibited higher levels of anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues compared to those from intact families.

Social support, defined as the perceived comfort, care, and assistance received from others, has been identified as a crucial factor in rationalize psychological distress. Research in the late 20th century emphasized the protective role of social support in buffering the negative effects of parental separation. For example, studies by Cohen and Wills (1985) highlighted that individuals with strong social support networks were better able to cope with stress and exhibited lower levels of psychological distress. Social support is pivotal in buffering individuals against the adverse effects of stress. They propose the "buffering hypothesis," which suggests that social support protects individuals from the harmful impacts of stressful events by influencing how they perceive and cope with these events (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

In the 21st century, the focus of research has expanded to include a more significance understanding of the interplay between family background, psychological distress, and social support. Modern studies have utilized more sophisticated methodologies, such as longitudinal designs and advanced statistical techniques, to examine these relationships. For instance, a study by Lansford and colleagues (2006) demonstrated that the quality of the parent-child relationship post-separation significantly influenced the psychological adjustment of young adults.

Cultural and societal changes over the past few decades have also influenced the dynamics of marriage anxiety, psychological distress, and social support. Increased acceptance of diverse family structures, changes in gender roles, and evolving societal norms have reshaped the experiences of young adults from both separated and non-separated families. Researchers such as Demo and Acock (1996) have highlighted how these cultural shifts have moderated the effects of parental separation on young adults, emphasizing the importance of considering contextual factors in psychological research. The historical trajectory of research on marriage anxiety, psychological distress, and social support among young adults from separate and non-separated families reveals a rich and evolving field of study. From early theoretical foundations to present-day empirical investigations, the findings underscore the profound impact of family structure on psychological outcomes.

Family structure plays a critical role in the development and well-being of individuals, particularly children. Researchers have extensively studied the impacts of both separated and non-separated families to understand the various outcomes associated with each family type. Separated families, often resulting from divorce or separation, have been associated with a range of psychological, emotional, and social outcomes for children. According to Amato (2000), children in separated families typically experience more emotional problems compared to those in non-separated families.

In contrast, non-separated families, where both parents live together, generally provide a more stable environment for children. Research indicates that children in these families benefit from greater emotional stability, higher academic achievement, and better social relationships (Fomby & Cherlin, 2007). The presence of both parents often translates into more financial stability and resources, which positively affects children's educational and extracurricular opportunities (Sun & Li, 2011).

Previous research has acknowledged the associations between marital status and psychological well-being (Waite, 1995), social support and psychological well-being (Thoits, 1995), and marital status and social support (Pugliesi & Shook, 1998). Previous research literature often fails to adequately address the nuances of marriage anxiety evaluation among both separated and non-separated families. Numerous studies are present that has focused on the individuals of divorced

and separated families, for example, studies have shown that adolescents with separated parents have a higher risk of emotional and behavioral problems and have a higher prevalence of psychiatric disorders than peers living in non-separated two-parent families (Honohan, 2009). This study seeks to bridge this gap by systematically examining the relationship between marriage anxiety, psychological distress, and social support among individuals from separated and non-separated families. By employing a quantitative approach, encompassing quantitative surveys, this research aims to elucidate the underlying mechanisms driving these associations. Ultimately, the findings of this study hold implications for clinical practice, family therapy, and policy interventions aimed at supporting individuals navigating marital challenges and fostering healthy relationship dynamics within the family unit. This study contributes to the understanding of how the experience of parental separation may impact an individual's anxiety related to marriage, shedding light on factors that may contribute to heightened anxiety levels. To investigate the levels of marriage anxiety, social support and psychological distress experienced by individuals from separated and non-separated families. To explore the relationships among marriage anxiety, psychological distress, and social support in individuals from separated and non-separated families.

Literature Review

Marriage, a pivotal life event, is often perceived as a cornerstone of adult life, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. However, the stability of one's family background, particularly whether parents are separated or together, can deeply influence young adults' perceptions and experiences of marriage. This literature review seeks to explore the varied impacts of parental separation on marriage anxiety, psychological distress, and social support among young adults. By examining existing study, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how family structure during formative years shapes marital attitudes and mental health outcomes, highlighting the complexities and connection built-in in these dynamics.

Research suggests that individuals experiencing marriage anxiety are more likely to exhibit symptoms of psychological distress (Proulx et al., 2007). This relationship can be particularly pronounced in the context of separated families, where the dissolution of the marital relationship can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and distress (Amato & James, 2010). Additionally, social support has been identified as a crucial buffer against the negative impact of marital stressors on psychological well-being (Brock & Lawrence, 2008). However, the availability and effectiveness of social support may differ between separated and non-separated families, with individuals in the former group potentially experiencing reduced access to supportive networks (Doherty & Needle, 1991).

Marriage Anxiety and Psychological Distress

Responsibilities of marriage, fear of commitment and trust issues causes anxiety and problems in marriage relationship. Many researches have focused on the different aspects effecting marital relationship and suggested the possible solutions for the better outcomes. Recent studies underscore the significant impact of parental separation, marriage anxiety, and inter-parental conflict on mental health. Birkeland et al. (2023) examined 485 adolescents over 15 years, finding parental separation linked to recurring depression and anxiety in adulthood, particularly among those with prior vulnerability. Similarly, William and Johnson (2019) explored marriage anxiety in 200 college students, discovering its strong predictive power for psychological distress, especially depression and generalized anxiety. Angela and Briana extended these findings to East Asian contexts, showing that marital anxiety correlates with psychological distress in a Japanese sample,

even after accounting for neuroticism, social relationships, and demographics. Rhodes (2023) focused on children from divorced families, revealing that exposure to inter-parental conflict heightens fears of abandonment and subsequent mental health issues, which persist over time despite high-quality parenting. Johnson and Wu (2002) highlighted the mediating role of marriage anxiety in the relationship between parental divorce and mental health, showing higher levels of distress and relationship challenges among individuals from divorced families. These findings collectively emphasize the importance of addressing marital and familial dynamics in therapeutic settings to mitigate long-term psychological impacts, particularly in vulnerable populations like adolescents, young adults, and children from separated families.

Psychological Distress and Social Support

Social support, particularly from one's spouse, plays a crucial role in mitigating these distressing emotions. Research suggests that higher levels of social support within a marriage are associated with lower levels of psychological distress and anxiety. This support can manifest in various forms, such as emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and empathetic listening. When individuals feel understood, accepted, and validated by their spouse, they are better equipped to cope with the uncertainties and challenges inherent in marital relationships. Moreover, a supportive marital environment fosters a sense of security and belonging, which can buffer against the negative effects of stressors like marriage anxiety. Social support act as the factor controlling psychological distress in many cases before and after marriage.

Recent research highlights the critical role of social support in mitigating mental health challenges, particularly in the context of marriage anxiety, parental divorce, and caregiving stress. Ayyash-Abdo and Alamuddin (2020) found that Lebanese adolescents from separated families reported higher social fear, avoidance, depression, and suicidal ideation, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions. Janhavi et al. (2020) revealed that mental disorders, except alcohol use disorder, were negatively associated with perceived social support, with married individuals reporting higher support levels. Edwards et al. (2020), in a study of 267,041 Australians, found that carers experienced elevated psychological distress, but higher perceived social support significantly moderated this effect. Peggy's 1984 study showed that social support, defined as close, trusting relationships, reduced psychological distress and improved life quality, particularly among disadvantaged individuals. Collectively, these studies underscore the protective role of social support in reducing anxiety, depression, and distress across diverse populations. They highlight the importance of fostering strong social networks to buffer against psychological challenges and improve well-being, especially for vulnerable groups such as adolescents from separated families, individuals with mental disorders, and caregivers facing heightened stress.

Marriage Anxiety and Social Support

Marriage anxiety is influenced by social support, with lack of emotional support heightening anxiety about relationships. Qadir's 2013 study on Pakistani women found that higher social support improves marital satisfaction and adjustment, reducing depression and anxiety. Women in nuclear families, with lower education, or higher socio-economic status faced more mental health issues. William et al. (2019) revealed that young adults from separated families experience greater relationship anxiety and lower perceived social support, impacting adult attachment and relationships. O'Hara et al. (2023) found that parental conflicts in divorced or separated families linked to abandonment fears and mental health issues, unaffected by strong paternal bonds.

Purpose of current study

The purpose of this study is to examine the interplay of marriage anxiety, psychological distress, and social support among individuals from separated and non-separated families. Marriage anxiety, often rooted in family dynamics and past relational experiences, is a significant concern that influences psychological well-being. Individuals from separated families may face heightened marriage anxiety and psychological distress due to experiences of family dissolution, whereas individuals from non-separated families benefit from robust social support networks that mitigate these challenges. Despite the prevalence of studies on marital relationships, limited research directly compares these variables across family structures. This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating how family background influences marriage anxiety and psychological distress, with social support serving as a critical moderating factor. The findings aim to provide insights for clinical practice, family therapy, and policy development, fostering interventions that promote mental health and relationship resilience in diverse family contexts.

Operational Definition of Variables

Marriage Anxiety

Marriage anxiety also known as gamophobia, is the fear of commitment or fear of marriage. It is a more common form of fear and one of the basic human emotions (Dağ, 1999). Pre-marital anxiety scale (Afzal et al., 2019) was used to measure the marriage anxiety among individuals of separated and non-separated families.

Psychological Distress

Psychological distress is described as "a state of emotional suffering characterized by symptoms of depression and anxiety, which can be caused by stress and adverse life events" (Drapeau et al., 2012). The DASS 21 scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), a short form of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS), was used to examine the psychological distress among sample individuals.

Social Support

Social support has been described as "support accessible to an individual through social ties to other individuals, groups, and the larger community" (Lin et al., 1979). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988) was used to examine the level of perceived social support among individuals of separated and non-separated families.

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis can be proposed:

1. Individuals from separated families will report higher levels of marriage anxiety and psychological distress compared to those from non-separated families.
2. Social support will be lower among individuals from separated families compared to those from non-separated families.
3. There will be a positive correlation between marriage anxiety and psychological distress among individuals from both separated and non-separated families.
4. Social support will negatively correlate with both marriage anxiety and psychological distress among individuals from both separated and non-separated families.

Methodology

The methodology of this study focused on comparing marriage anxiety, psychological distress, and social support among young adults from separated and non-separated families. A sample of 200 participants (110 from separated families and 90 from non-separated families) aged 18 to 35 years ($M = 21.64$, $SD = 1.43$) was selected from Sahiwal and Chichawatni, Pakistan, using purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria involved individuals whose parents were divorced or intact for at least five years. Pending divorce cases and individuals outside the specified age range were excluded. The study adopted a comparative research design with a cross-sectional survey method. Instruments included the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21), and Pre-Marital Anxiety Scale (PMAS), all validated in Urdu with high reliability. Data were collected via in-person surveys, with permission obtained from the University of Sahiwal and local union councils, ensuring ethical protocols.

Statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, regression, and independent sample t-tests, were conducted using SPSS to examine relationships and group differences in marriage anxiety, psychological distress, and social support. The findings aim to enhance understanding of psychological dynamics in varying family contexts, contributing to targeted interventions and family therapy practices.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study was conducted to compare marriage anxiety, psychological distress, and social support among young adults from separated and non-separated families. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participants' demographic information and the key study variables. Reliability analysis was conducted to ensure the internal consistency of the scales used. Correlation analysis examined the relationships between marriage anxiety, psychological distress, and social support. Linear regression was employed to explore the predictive relationships among the variables. Additionally, an independent sample t-test was utilized to compare the mean differences between individuals from separated and non-separated families on the key variables. Data was analyzed using SPSS software to ensure accurate and reliable results. This systematic analysis provided insights into the interplay of the studied variables across the two family structures, contributing to a deeper understanding of their psychological and social dynamics.

Results

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, 1998) was administered to access the level of social support among the individuals of both separated and non-separated families. The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) and Pre-Marital Anxiety Scale (Afzal et al., 2019) was used to access the psychological state of individuals and marriage anxiety they are experiencing due to different factors. Statistical techniques, Correlation and Independent sample t-test were used in the study in order to test the hypothesis of the study.

Reliability Analysis of all Variables

Table 1: Internal consistency (alpha coefficient) of all scales (N=200)

Scales	No. of Items
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Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support	12	.96
Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21	21	.96
Pre- Marital Anxiety Scale	46	.97

Table 1 demonstrates the internal consistency (alpha coefficient) of all scales analyzed in the present study. The reliability analysis of the scales used in this study indicates varying degrees of internal consistency. The Multi-Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) exhibited a Cronbach's alpha of .96, suggesting moderate internal consistency. The Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21) demonstrated a higher reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .96, indicating good internal consistency. Lastly, the Pre-Marital Anxiety Scale (PMAS) showed a Cronbach's alpha of .97, reflecting a strong internal consistency. These reliability coefficients underscore the robustness of the items within each scale, ensuring the validity of the measures used in this research.

Frequency Distribution of Demographics of Study

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Sample (N=200)

Variables	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Male	105	52.5
Female	95	47.5
Education		
Inter	88	44
Masters	112	56
Occupation		
Student	104	52
Business Person	28	14
Government Employ	18	0.9
Others	50	25
Family Background		
Separated/divorced families	110	55
Non-separated families	90	45
	Range	<i>M (SD)</i>
Age	18-35	21.64(1.43)

In Table 2, the demographic characteristics of the sample are presented, including gender, education, occupation, and family background. The sample comprised 200 participants, with a nearly balanced gender distribution: 105 males (52.5%) and 95 females (47.5%). The educational background of the participants varied, with 88 individuals (44%) having completed

intermediate education and 112 individuals (56%) holding a master's degree. The occupational categories included students (104 participants, 52%), business persons (28 participants, 14%), government servants (18 participants, 9%), and other occupations (50 participants, 25%). Additionally, the sample included individuals from separated families (110 participants, 55%) and non-separated families (90 participants, 45%). The age range of participants was between 18 and 35 years, with a mean age of 21.64 years ($M = 21.64$) and a standard deviation of 1.43 ($SD = 1.43$). This demographic distribution ensures a diverse and representative sample for the study.

Descriptive Statistics of all Scales

Table 3: Mean, Standard deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis of all scales (N=200)

Scales	No. of Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
MSPSS	12	46.02	19.46	.36	-1.42
DASS-21	21	54.24	15.26	-.36	-1.15
PMAS	46	159.90	41.74	-.72	-.13

Note. MSPS=Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, DASS-21= Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales, PMAS= Pre-Marital Anxiety Scale

Table 3 demonstrates the mean and standard deviation of all scales. It also shows the skewness and kurtosis of all scales which lies in normal range. The Social Support Scale, consisting of 12 items, has a mean score of 46.025 with a standard deviation of 19.466. The DASS-21, which includes 21 items, has a mean score of 54.245 with a standard deviation of 15.265. The Marriage Anxiety Scale, containing 46 items, has a higher mean score of 159.905 with a standard deviation of 41.746.

Correlation Analysis of Study Variables

Pearson Product moment was used to analyze the relationship among all of the study variables based on the family backgrounds of individuals.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix for the Study Variables of Separated Family Individuals (n=110)

Variables	1	2	3
Social Support			
Psychological Distress	-0.48**		
Marriage Anxiety	-0.57**	0.47**	

The correlation matrix for the study variables of separated family individuals ($n = 110$) indicates that social support is significantly negatively correlated with psychological distress ($r = -.48, p < .01$) and marriage anxiety ($r = -.57, p < .01$). Additionally, psychological distress is significantly positively correlated with marriage anxiety ($r = .47, p < .01$).

Table 5: Correlation Matrix for the Study Variables of Non-Separated Family Individuals (n=90)

Variables	1	2	3
Social Support	--	-0.31**	-0.11
Psychological Distress	--	--	-.58**
Marriage Anxiety	--	--	--

$p < 0.01$

Table 5 shows the correlation matrix for social support, psychological distress, and marriage anxiety among individuals from non-separated families ($N = 90$). Social support is significantly negatively correlated with psychological distress ($r = -0.31$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher social support is associated with lower psychological distress. There is no significant correlation between social support and marriage anxiety ($r = -0.11$). However, psychological distress is significantly positively correlated with marriage anxiety ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that higher psychological distress is associated with higher marriage anxiety in this group.

Family Background Differences of all Variables

Independent sample t -test was used to analyze the family background differences among all variables.

Table 6: Mean comparison of Marriage Anxiety, Psychological Distress and Social Support on separated and non-separated family individuals

Variables	Individuals from separated families		Individuals from non-separated families		$t(198)$	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
SS	31.74	9.57	63.47	13.22	-19.6	.00	-2.79
PD	65.47	8.12	40.52	9.69	19.80	.00	2.81
MA	187.5	21.65	126.1	35.16	15.15	.00	1.45

Note. SS= Social support, PD= Psychological Distress, MA= Marriage Anxiety

In the table 6 the results showed significant difference across all three variables. Specifically, individuals from non-separated families reported significantly higher levels of social support ($M = 63.47$, $SD = 13.22$) compared to those from separated families ($M = 31.74$, $SD = 9.57$), $t(198) = -19.60$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = -2.79$). Conversely, individuals from separated families experienced significantly higher psychological distress ($M = 65.47$, $SD = 8.12$) than those from non-separated families ($M = 40.52$, $SD = 9.69$), $t(198) = 19.80$, $p < .001$, also with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 2.81$). Additionally, marriage anxiety was notably greater among individuals from separated families ($M = 187.5$, $SD = 21.65$) compared to their non-separated counterparts ($M = 126.1$, $SD = 35.16$), $t(198) = 15.15$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's

$d=1.45$). These findings highlight the substantial impact of family structure on young adults' psychological well-being and social support systems, with separated family individuals experiencing higher psychological distress and marriage anxiety, and lower social support.

Linear Regression Analysis of Study Variables

Table 7: Regression Coefficient of Social Support as a Predictor of Marriage Anxiety and Psychological Distress

Variables	<i>B</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
Constant	1.91***		.27
Social Support	.01***	.42	.002
Psychological Distress	-.01***	-.37	.002
Marriage Anxiety	-.002*	-.15	.001
R^2	.78		

Note. $N=200$, *** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

The results of the linear regression analysis indicated that the model was significant, explaining 78 percent of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2=.78$). Among the predictors, social support was found to be a significant positive predictor ($\beta=0.42$, $p<.001$), suggesting that higher levels of social support are associated with an increase in the outcome variable. Psychological distress was a significant negative predictor ($\beta=-0.37$, $p<.001$), indicating that higher levels of psychological distress are associated with a decrease in the outcome variable. Additionally, marriage anxiety was also a significant negative predictor ($\beta=-0.15$, $p=.046$), showing that higher levels of marriage anxiety are slightly associated with a decrease in the outcome variable. These results highlight the importance of social support, psychological distress, and marriage anxiety in influencing the outcome variable.

Discussion

All the measures used in study have good internal consistency and scales were reliable (see Table 1). Scales were used in Urdu version, already available on internet. Multi-Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), The Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21) and Pre-Marital Anxiety Scale (PMAS) showed the Cronbach's alpha .96, .96 and .97 respectively. These high reliability scores enhance the credibility of the findings and support the validity of the scales used in this study. So, these scales are applicable to Pakistani population.

The correlation analysis provided significant insights into the interrelationships among social support, psychological distress, and marriage anxiety. The strong negative correlation between social support and psychological distress suggests that social support plays a critical role in mitigating stress and enhancing mental well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Similarly, the strong negative correlation between social support and marriage anxiety highlights the protective role of social support in reducing anxiety related to marriage, emphasizing the importance of fostering

supportive social networks (Cutrona & Russell, 1987). Conversely, the findings of strong positive correlation between psychological distress and marriage anxiety is consistent with existing literature, indicating that psychological distress is a significant predictor of anxiety-related issues, including those related to marital relationships (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

The comparison between individuals from separated and non-separated families revealed significant differences in social support, psychological distress, and marriage anxiety. The findings suggest that family structure plays a crucial role in influencing an individual's perceived social support, psychological distress, and anxiety related to marriage.

The study's findings supported all four hypotheses. First, individuals from separated families reported significantly higher marriage anxiety and psychological distress than those from non-separated families, consistent with prior research (e.g., Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001), which found that individuals from divorced families are at higher risk for emotional and psychological issues. Second, individuals from separated families perceived significantly lower social support compared to their non-separated counterparts. This aligns with Manzon's (2023) findings that parental separation diminishes support within families and Fares et al.'s (2023) research linking parental separation to social anxiety and reduced social support in adolescents. Third, the study established a positive correlation between psychological distress and marriage anxiety for individuals from both family types, supported by Brown and Green's (2019) work showing that heightened psychological distress is associated with greater marriage anxiety. Lastly, the study revealed a strong negative correlation between social support, marriage anxiety, and psychological distress, indicating that higher social support mitigates psychological distress and marriage anxiety. This aligns with research emphasizing the protective role of social support in reducing stress and improving marital satisfaction (Frontiers, 2020). Overall, the findings highlight the critical interplay between family structure, social support, psychological well-being, and marriage anxiety.

Conclusion

Analyses of the study shows sufficient internal consistency of all of the study variables. Sample ($N = 200$) was divided in individuals from separated families ($n = 110$) and individuals from non-separated families ($n = 90$). Results shows that there is significant positive relationship between marriage anxiety and psychological distress while there is strong negative relationship between marriage anxiety and social supports. Results also revealed that there is significant difference in the scores of separated and non-separated family individuals. The regression analysis further demonstrated that social support is a significant positive predictor, while psychological distress and marriage anxiety are significant negative predictors of outcome variable.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study will be provided on request.

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