

A Study to Assess the Impact of COVID-19 on Marital Relationships Among Married Couples in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has affected each and every part of our lives and is continuously poking its nose till now in the form of one or the other strain. People have suffered it in terms of their health, wealth and relationships. The physical, mental, social, spiritual, vocational, biological, psychological aspects of health had been left in glitches and malfunctioning. COVID 19 induced separations in some places however at some other areas it acted as a cohesive force to tackle with it in unison. The main aim of this study was to assess the couple conflict levels among married couples induced by COVID-19 or post COVID-19 situations. The study was conducted by means of online google forms via online mode in which the investigators prepared and forwarded questionnaire links to a few known married couples with their request to forward the same to other known married couples living within Srinagar city only. Thus, sampling was done by non-probability snowball technique. The study was conducted on the couples residing in the jurisdiction of Srinagar city of Jammu and Kashmir only. The links of questionnaires to collect responses were kept open from first January to 10th January 2023. The result of the study depicted that majority 54 (90%) of study subjects belonged to the religion of Islam, majority 24 (40%) of the study subjects were in the age group of 31-40 years of age, almost equal number 32 (53.33%) were males and 28 (46.66%) were females, majority 42 (70%) were government employees, maximum 52 (86.70%) of the study subjects were having education level of graduation and above and half of the study subjects 30 (50%) of the study subjects while living in joint families. The study also revealed that there is significant association between couple conflict levels and selected demographic variables [religion ($p=0.001$), gender ($p=0.041$), occupation ($p=0.000$) and education ($p=0.02$)] except for age ($p=0.127$) and family type ($p=0.07$).

Keywords: COVID-19, Marital Relationship, Married Couples

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Corona virus was declared as a global emergency word by the world health organisation (WHO) in the year 2019-2020 as it affected people at global level and in every aspect and section of life and society respectively. Coronavirus was expanding at an alarming rate at that time and is still present in the population and recurring in the form of new strains. It was a severe pandemic that scared people and caused anxiety among masses. It caused major breakdown in the social fabrics and overall health of a person. The corona virus brought havoc on mankind by letting in miseries in various forms.¹

Novel coronaviruses (CoV) is a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases particularly affecting respiratory systems in the form of Middle east respiratory syndrome (MERS) and Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).^{2,3}

The corona virus that has originated from China and within a short period of time engulfed the whole world and entangled it. In 2019-20 it was decided by China's national health commission (NHC) to call it by the name of novel coronavirus pneumonia and was commonly abbreviated as NCP in China at that time. As novel itself means new, however we know that it is a well-known zoonotic disease that can't be called as novel for long and was thus renamed as COVID-19 means coronavirus disease of 2019.1 The COVID-19 has affected people at a global level not only in terms of physical and mental health but had affected social life as well. The novel coronavirus (n-CoV 2) was named in 2020 as COVID-19 by WHO.

The process of permitting male and female couples to remain together and in approved form by society is what we call marriage. Here the couple have some rights and duties to enjoy and have social contract to carry on their life. They have to obey social customs, traditions, religious ceremony and societal consent. This is the reason that marriage is considered as an indispensable dimension in the life of human beings as it makes a person not only satisfy his/her basic needs and also to prevent adultery and to have their own progeny as well. Though there are rights and duties to enjoy but sometimes there occurs some miscommunication or changes in priorities within family or couple have different thinking patterns that we call as individual differences that if not responded or taken care of will precipitate in conflicts. These situations often occur when there are some appealing options to choose but couples are indecisive or there are some stressful life events that cause problems in married life and their behaviour is less harmonious among themselves.⁴

A few studies have been conducted regarding the impact of this pandemic which we call by the name of COVID-19 on individuals, families, communities etc. Similarly, this disease has affected the marital relationships and has increased the couple conflict levels at international level. Though there are some examples where the couples continued to stay together with harmonious relationships even after this pandemic. Thus, the marriages as an institution were working even in COVID-19 period. The couples continued to support each other and their respective families in the distressed times.⁵

The World Health Organization (WHO) has imposed social or psychological distancing to a lockdown for not having social interactions, this effort is made as an effort to stop its spread. The intensity of meeting a husband and wife and children for almost 24 hours because they have to stay at home will have different effects for each individual. This condition wants to

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explain whether the relationship between a partner and family improves or worsens during a pandemic.

The report quoted by the Saudi ministry of Justice has said in one of the interviews at the time of peak period of COVID -19 there was a 30% increase in. divorce/khula rate in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The report was further added by the news that during the same lockdown period, 13000 people got engaged and married thus having full faith in the institution of marriage. Thus, it was noted that there was a 5% increase in marriage rates during the same COVID-19 lockdown period.⁶

Social networks help families to build enjoyable family leisure, stay connected and increase sense of belonging. Numerous pre-pandemic studies have demonstrated that one of the strongest predictors of intimate partner violence is intense relationship conflict.⁷

Additionally, many recent studies indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased rates of intimate partner conflict.⁸

In one of the study conducted by Rohling JL, Grace ES, Ryan A, Mennicke A, Harris YJ, Sullivan S, et al in 2022 on "Couple Conflict and Intimate Partner Violence during the Early Lockdown of the Pandemic: The Good, the Bad, or Is It Just the Same in a North Carolina, Low-Resource Population". The study focused on under-resourced North Carolina residents (n = 107) who self-reported changes in relationship conflict (Increased, Decreased, Stayed the Same) and intimate partner violence (IPV) during the pandemic. The study also revealed that decreased conflict was associated with being ill from the virus (48.9%), having health insurance, and working part time. Substantial amounts of IPV were reported (62.2% of the sample); however, increased conflict and IPV were unrelated.

Need for the study

It has been seen via online search and search in data based as available via online mode, we came to know that there was no research available in any form in Srinagar J&K that would have evaluated impact of COVID-19 on the marital relationships by taking response from married couples. So, in order to know the impact of COVID-19 on marital relationships in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, being Muslim majority area and to get a clue regarding the state of mind of people, living here, who have gone through various odd situations in the past many years the researchers got interested to check whether they have adapted to this culture of lockdown and restrictions and their resilience again these situations where they most of the time remained indoors like that of COVID-19 and the relationship they enjoy with each other. This study was also conducted with the view whether there could be any positive approach of Muslims married couples towards their spouses during this hard time and check their supportive or non-cooperative attitude.

METHODOLOGY

In this study a quantitative approach was adopted to assess the impact of COVID-19 on marital relationships among couples in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir, India. Here a descriptive research design (exploratory) was utilised to achieve the objectives of the study.

In the present study, couple conflicts were the dependent research variables under study while as COVID 19 was taken as an independent research variable. In the present study the

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demographic variables included were age, gender, education, occupation, and family type. The present study was conducted via online mode.

The questionnaire was framed via google forms and was forwarded to a few married couples in contact with a request to forward to all other concerned married persons in contact and residing in the Srinagar city. The google form was framed in such a way that it had not collected the personal identification of respondents, and it was mentioned that they have the right not to participate in this study. The tool was developed by going through studies and research reviews available on the internet.¹⁰

After consent, the participant can respond to the items on the google form. Thus, in this study non probability (snowball sampling) was done.

RESULTS

Analysis and interpretation was done in accordance with the objectives laid down for the study. The purpose of analysis is to make data meaningful and interpretable. This data should be available as a valued piece of information for other researchers to come.

In order to analyse the association of selected demographic variable is with conflict levels among couples null hypothesis was framed as,

H₀₁: there is no significant association between couple conflict level in COVID-19 and selected demographic variables (religion, age, gender, occupation, education and family type) at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of study subjects as per their demographic variables. N= 60

Demographic variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Religion	Islam	54	90%
	Hindu	6	10%
Age	21-30	19	31.67%
	31-40	24	40%
	41-50	13	21.67%
	51-60	0	0
	61-70	04	6.66%
Gender	Male	32	53.33%
	Female	28	46.66%
Occupation	Government Employee	42	70%
	Private Job	2	3.30%
	Businessman/Businesswoman	6	10%
	Other	6	10%
	Unemployed	4	6.70%
Education	Graduate and above	52	86.70%
	10+2	8	13.30%
	10 th	0	0%
Family Type	Nuclear Family	22	36.70%
	Joint Family	30	50%
	Extended Family	8	13.30%

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The data presented in table 1 depicted that the majority 54 (90%) of study subjects belonged to the religion of Islam and only 6 (10%) of the study subjects belonged to Hindu religion. The data further revealed that majority 24 (40%) of the study subjects were in the age group of 31-40 years of age, followed by 19 (31.67%) were in the age group of 21-30 years of age, followed by 13 (21.67%) in the age group of 41-50 years of age and only 04 (6.66%) were in the age group of 61-70 years. The data presented in table 1 also depicted that 32 (53.33%) were males and 28(46.66%) were female. It also revealed that the majority 42 (70%) were government employees followed by 6 (10%) businessman/ businesswoman followed by 6 (10%) in other categories followed by 4 (6.70%) as unemployed and just 2 (3.30%) had a private job as the occupation. The maximum 52 (86.70%) of the study subjects were having education level of graduation and above followed by 8 (13.30%) having 10+2 is their educational qualification whereas there was none having 10th or below. The table 1 also represented that half of the study subjects 30 (50%) of the study subjects while living in joint families wireless 22 (36.70%) were living in nuclear families and just 8 (13.30%) while living in extended families.

Table 2: Analysis of three point Likert scale. N=60

Item	Strongly agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree
Have you ever been abused physically by your partner in COVID 19 situation?	(6) 10%	(6)10%	(48) 80%
Have you been sexually exploited by your partner against your will and wish in COVID 19 situation?	(4) 6.70%	(6) 10%	(50) 83.30%
Has your partner ever made you an emotional scapegoat in COVID 19 situation?	(10) 16.70%	(10) 16.70%	(40) 66.70%
Have you ever adapted the lifestyle that triggers conflicts with your partners or vice versa in COVID 19 situations?	(6) 10%	(20) 33.30%	(34) 56.70%
Have you suffered from social isolation in COVID 19 situation?	(42) 70%	(12) 20%	(6) 10%
Have you ever met with circumstances with lack of access to formal services in COVID 19 situations?	(36) 60%	(18) 30%	(6) 10%
Have you ever suffered from money worries and food insufficiency in COVID 19 situations?	(14) 23.30%	(20) 33.30%	(26) 43.30%
Have you found yourself in a situation of helplessness/powerlessness in COVID-19?	(30) 50%	(26) 43.30%	(4) 6.70%
Have you ever been dominated or excessively controlled by your partner in COVID 19 situation?	(4) 6.70%	(16) 26.70%	(40) 66.70%

The table 2 is self-explanatory in nature and depicts how study subjects responded to each statement in the couple conflict scale.

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Table 3: Association of Couple conflict level during COVID 19 with selected demographic variables

Variable		Couple Conflict Level			χ^2 cal	χ^2 tab	df	p value
		Mild	Moderate	Severe				
Religion	Islam	37	15	2	13.80	5.99	2	0.001
	Hindu	0	4	2				
Age (in years)	21-30	13	6	0	9.94	12.59	6	0.127
	31-40	16	6	2				
	41-50	4	7	2				
	51-60	0	0	0				
	61-70	4	0	0				
Gender	Male	19	13	0	6.37	5.99	2	0.041
	Female	18	06	04				
occupation	Govt. Employee	25	17	0	43.10	15.50	8	0.000
	Private Job	0	0	2				
	Businessman/woman	4	2	0				
	Any other	4	0	2				
	Unemployed	4	0	0				
Education	Graduate & Above	21	19	02	7.84	5.99	2	0.02
	10+2	06	0	2				
	10 th	0	0	0				
Family Type	Nuclear Family	15	07	0	8.6	9.49	4	0.07
	Joint Family	20	08	02				
	Extended Family	02	04	02				

In the above table we are able to see that chi square calculated is more than chi square tabulated with p value given against each in the variables pertaining to religion (p=0.001), gender (p=0.041), occupation (p=0.000) and education (p=0.02) except age (p=0.127) and family type (p=0.07).

So, we reject the null hypothesis in terms of religion, gender, occupation and education and fail to reject the null hypothesis in terms of age and family type.

Thus, the study has shown that there is significant association between couple conflict levels with selected demographic variables [religion (p=0.001), gender (p=0.041), occupation (p=0.000) and education (p=0.02)] and thus affect marital relationships.

DISCUSSION

The study was conducted in order to assess the couple conflict levels among married couples induced by COVID-19 or post COVID- 19 situations and the resilience of people to bear the brunt and take care of other dependents or cohabitating partners in the Muslim majority area. This study was first of its kind in our area, specifically in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir.

The result is of the study depicted that majority 54 (90%) of study subjects belonged to the religion of Islam, majority 24 (40%) of the study subjects were in the age group of 31-40 years of age, almost equal number 32 (53.33%) were males and 28(46.66%) were females, majority 42 (70%) were government employees, maximum 52 (86.70%) of the study subjects were having education level of graduation and above and half of the study subjects 30 (50%) of the study subjects while living in joint families.

The findings of the study revealed that religion plays an important role in one's life. One's religion brings resilience and motivates a client to take the problem positively with hope that

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it will subside. The study subjects having Islam as religion were more in number in the study and results revealed that they were having mild couple conflict level while as the data revealed that moderate to severe couple conflict levels were noted in study subjects having Hinduism as their religion. Thus, by means of empirical evidence gained from the study we can say that Muslim respondents reported minimum conflicts and have positive relationships among themselves while as Hindu respondents reported moderate to severe couple conflicts. The study has also revealed there is strong association between occupation and couple conflict. As there were only two persons who were in private jobs and had reported severe couple conflict levels due to COVID-19 situation. This might be due to loss of income or inability to meet the basic needs of life or inability to fulfil family demands. This could be due to loss of employment or lay off by private organizations with limited income. This COVID-19 has not only affected our health but it somehow has penetrated into society and caused disruption in the social life of people. These conditions have led to personal and family disorganization. There must be some government initiative or rules to prevent the private sector from discharging employees from their organization. This could prevent people from mental illnesses/stress/anxiety/disorganizations and will maintain good living conditions and mental health; that will eventually decrease marital disharmony and discord. Thus, occupation in which there is continuous and uninterrupted supply of finances or income or money there are less chances of marital conflicts.

The study also revealed that couple conflicts are less common and of mild nature in educated class. Thus, those with higher educational qualifications have more level of understanding and sorting issues or problems. They think about how to improve relationships in times of stress and strain.

The family type doesn't have any association with couple conflicts as has been depicted by the study.

There are not so many studies that can support or contradict our study and are novice in itself as of now.

CONCLUSION

The couple having a good level of understanding, having a good source of income, are well educated have less chances of conflicts in any situation be it COVID-19 or something else. The research findings have revealed that females are more prone to conflicts and are at the receiving end. They are made scapegoats by the male partners who are the main victims of stressful events and situations.

Positive thinking and looking at positive aspects of negative situations are also a way to solve problems, be motivated, be steadfast to resolve the differences and keep the life going on with positive vibes. Marital relationships become stronger when spouses support and have mutual understanding.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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