

## Comparative Study on Marital Adjustment, Reasons for Living and Suicide Risk in Married Individuals and People Going through Divorce

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### ABSTRACT

India has observed trend of suicide among married individuals especially those who are going through their divorce proceedings. Nonetheless, the current data on suicide deaths reports large number of individuals being married in which suicide by men was higher as compared to females. Several studies suggest association of marriage as significant factor in suicidality. However, researches in India report limited data, lack of systematic investigation considering suicide risk in married population as well as no data on protective factors. Therefore, the aim of this study is to understand factors associated with suicide via systematically investigating and comparing marital adjustment, reasons for living and suicide risk within group of married individuals and people going through divorce. Method- The sample of 92 individuals (46-married, 46- going through divorce) participated in the study using sampling method of combination of purposive and snowball sampling. The tools used to measure included Personal Datasheet, Marital Adjustment Inventory by C. G Deshpande, Reasons for Living by Marsha Linehan and Columbia Suicide Severity Scale by Kelly Posner. The data was analyzed using SPSS software on descriptive statistics such as mean, median, standard deviation, range, skewness and kurtosis and normality test of Shapiro Wilk was administered which showed that the data was not normal. Therefore, non-parametric test of Mann- Whitney was employed. Results showed significance difference in Marital adjustment and suicide between the groups whereas reasons for living had no significant difference between them. Conclusion of the study- The study showed that married individuals were high in marital adjustment as compared to people going through divorce, suicide risk was higher in people going through divorce whereas there was no significant difference in reasons for living in both the groups.

**Keywords:** *Marital Adjustment, Reasons for Living, Suicidal Ideation, Suicide Risk, Suicide in India, Divorce, Protective Factors*

One of the greatest challenges in the field of mental health is associated with Suicide; a rising public health concern all around the world. Recent trends in the rate of suicide have been noticed to be increasing in the past decade in which married population were significant contributor of deaths by suicide. Currently, there are studies regarding

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## Comparative Study on Marital Adjustment, Reasons for Living and Suicide Risk in Married Individuals and People Going through Divorce

prevalence, methods, psychological and demographic factors (Radhakrishnan & Andrade, 2012) associated with suicide knowing family problems, illnesses and marriage related concerns to be main cause of death by suicide (*IMHO Blog - Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy*, 2024). Studies also show prevalence of mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders in people gone through divorce (Trichal, 2021). In recent times, there have been cases like of Atul Subhash and many others dying by suicide while ongoing divorce proceeding. Therefore, this study is set out to investigate and compare marital adjustment, reasons for living and suicide risk in married individuals and people going through divorce.

Marital adjustment is said to be a lifelong process. Marital adjustment can be defined as the mental state among couples in which there is an overall feeling of happiness and satisfaction with their marriage (ST Janetius, 1998). Marital adjustment is influenced by important factors such as feeling for spouse, harmonious relations, communication, mutual understanding, sexual relations and other factors related to marital life. (O.P. Mishra and S. K. Srivastava, 1977). Marital maladjustment is the disability of an individual to adjust with their partner leading to marital conflicts which is often influenced by personal reasons, bad temperament of any of the spouse/s, adultery practices, substance use, physiological and psychological stressors, interpersonal discrepancies, education gap between spouses, in laws interference, conflict management, work-life balance, etc. (Saini & Nanak, 2022)

Reasons for Living are “beliefs or expectancies thought to mitigate risk for suicide, and include survival and coping beliefs, responsibility to family, child-related concerns, fear of suicide, fear of social disapproval, and moral objections” (Britton et al., 2008). Reasons for living are related to cognitive behavioural approach to significant adaptive traits of an individual that protects them against emotional distress and suicidality. These belief systems are what contrasts suicidal person to a non-suicidal one. (Linehan et al., 1983)

Suicide risk refers to the likelihood that a person will make a suicide attempt or die by suicide. (Schatten et al., 2020). In the present paper, individuals who have thoughts, ideas, plan, intent and want to die by suicide are considered to be at risk of suicide.

*Assessment of risk level in suicidal individuals is as per follows:*

- Low Risk: Individuals with thoughts of death but have no plan, intent, or behavior of acting on it are at low risk for suicide
- Moderate Risk: Individuals with suicidal ideation with plan, but no actual intent or behavior to follow up are at moderate risk of suicide.
- High Risk: Individuals having suicidal ideation with a ready plan of when and where, method on how, and intent to carry out the suicide plan are at high risk of suicide. (Alberta Health Services, 2022)

The research on suicide has poor quality and of limited data in India. There is no research in India identifying protective factors or reasons for living. Along with that, higher rates of suicide rates have been reported in divorced population, study on which is largely unrecognized (Mayer & Ziaian, 2002). Several studies have identified gaps in research of protective factors of suicide in India (Rappai et al., 2020). There was no study found with association of marital adjustment with the protective beliefs of reasons for living, and association of suicide in marital dispute. The present research attempts to fill these research gaps.

## Comparative Study on Marital Adjustment, Reasons for Living and Suicide Risk in Married Individuals and People Going through Divorce

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### ***Aims And Objectives:***

1. To compare married individuals and people going through divorce on their marital adjustment
2. To compare married individuals and people going through divorce on their reasons for living.
3. To compare married individuals and people going through divorce on their present suicide risk.

#### ***Hypotheses:***

1. Married individuals would have higher marital adjustment than people going through divorce.
2. Married individuals will score higher on reasons for living scale as compared to people going through divorce.
3. There will be no significant difference in married individuals and people into divorce proceedings on suicide risk.

***Research design:*** Observation within group study design was adopted for the respective study.

***Participants in the study:*** A total number of 92 participants contributed in the present study out of which 46 were people with intact marriage (23 males and 23 females) and 46 individuals (23 males and 23 females) who were going through their divorce process in Pune Family court. They were selected by using purposive and snowball sampling method.

#### ***Inclusion criteria:***

1. People with age range 25-60.
2. People with at least one child.
3. Individuals who have filed petition for divorce.

#### ***Exclusion criteria:***

1. Individuals with diagnosed psychiatric condition.
2. Individuals who are widowed, remarried, already divorced.
3. Individuals with fatal medical condition.

***Materials/ Tools used:*** The data was collected using the following questionnaires:

1. Personal Datasheet: It was developed by the researcher itself to record their demographic data, marital data, information on divorce and additional information like distress areas, perceived distress level, strength and weakness, motivating factors and self-care practices in them.
2. Marital Adjustment Inventory: It was developed by C. G. Deshpande. It is a 25 item self-report measure designed to assess individual's as well as couple's marital adjustment. It assesses relationship with in laws, social participation, parenting, purchases, food habits, temperament, sexual satisfaction, love and affection, personal daily activities, likes and dislikes, etc. The psychometric properties of the tool are-
  - i) Reliability: .83 measured by split half method using odd even scores.
  - ii) Validity: Using biserial Correlation, the validity score is .49
  - iii) Norms: It is used for married individuals and couples.

## Comparative Study on Marital Adjustment, Reasons for Living and Suicide Risk in Married Individuals and People Going through Divorce

- iv) Scoring: The scoring of the test is as per Likert Scale and low scores indicate high adjustment and vice versa. (Deshpande, n.d.)
3. Reasons for Living Inventory: It is developed by psychologist Marsha Linehan and colleagues. It is 48 item inventory designed to measure an individual's reasons for living and not to choose dying by suicide even if he/she has that option. Dimensions included in the inventory are survival and coping beliefs, responsibility towards family, child related concerns, fear of suicide, fear of social disapproval and moral objections. (Linehan et al., 1983) The test indicates-
- i) Reliability: good internal reliability with Cronbach's alpha- .93, (Linehan et al., 1983)
  - ii) Validity: concurrent validity and predictive validity (Osman et al., 1999).
  - iii) Scoring: High scores indicate high number of reasons to live.
4. Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (Self report version- Recent): It is developed by Kelly Posner. It is a 6-item version that screens suicidal ideation and behavior in past one month with interpreting risk level in an individual. It measures desire for suicide, suicidal ideation, intent, plan and behavior in the past one month. High scores in suicide severity scales indicate higher risk. The test demonstrated strong psychometric properties with high reliability and predictive validity supported by several studies. (*The Columbia Lighthouse Project the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) Supporting Evidence*, n.d.)

**Data collection:** The data was collected using hardcopies of research tools in an offline setting such as in residential societies, public parks, lawyer's office and Pune family court.

**Data Analysis:** The data was analyzed in SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software in which descriptive statistics such as mean, skewness, kurtosis and Test of Normality such as Shapiro Wilk was employed. As the data came out to be not normal, Mann-Whitney U test was administered to compare variables within the group.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: The following table mentions descriptive statistics:**

	Marital Adjustment	Reasons for Living	Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale
N	92	92	92
Mean	64.10	217.46	.37
Median	57.50	219.00	.00
Standard Deviation	23.209	35.111	1.076
Skewness	.848	-.709	3.373
Std error of skewness	.251	.251	.251
Kurtosis	.403	1.111	11.941
Std error of kurtosis	.498	.498	.498
Range	116	172	6
Minimum	31	104	0
Maximum	147	276	6

**Comparative Study on Marital Adjustment, Reasons for Living and Suicide Risk in Married Individuals and People Going through Divorce**

**Table 2: The following table depicts non parametric test across categories:**

	Total N =92		Mann-Whitney	Mean rank		SD	p-value
	MP <sup>a</sup>	PID <sup>b</sup>		MP <sup>a</sup>	PID <sup>b</sup>		
<b>Marital Adjustment</b>	46	46	1910.0000	27.28	65.02	23.21	< .001
<b>Reasons for Living</b>	46	46	942.500	49.01	43.99	35.11	.367
<b>Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale</b>	46	46	1267.500	41.95	51.05	1.08	.007

<sup>a</sup> MP refers to Married people

<sup>b</sup> PID refers to People into Divorce.

## **DISCUSSION**

The present research was designed to investigate and compare groups of married and into divorce individuals on the basis of their marital adjustment, reasons for living and suicide risk by which promising results have been obtained.

The results highlighted by descriptive statistics as shown in table 1, indicate that there is significant deviation from normal distribution of data revealed by the scores of skewness and kurtosis. The data also underwent test of Normality- Shapiro Wilk test in which data for reasons for living was not normal as well as it was not statistically significant. This result is supported by p value of 0.367 which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, non-parametric test of Mann-Whitney U test was employed to compare groups of married and people into divorce.

Table 2 depicts scale wise comparative scores that lead to the following key findings:

1] The comparative analysis found evidence that marital adjustment is higher in married individuals and lower in people going through divorce. It is evident as mean rank of married people is lower at 25.28 and people into divorce is 65.02. As scoring of marital adjustment scale refers low scores to have higher marital adjustment, it can be said that married individuals have higher adjustment than people going through divorce in marital adjustment.

As hypothesized, that married individuals will score higher on marital adjustment than people going through divorce, the study has failed to reject the hypothesis. The hypothesis is supported by p value is < .001 which means the results are highly significant. This result ties well with previous study conducted by Abhijeet Faye and colleagues (2013) where poor marital adjustment is linked with people seeking divorce in India. A popular explanation to poor marital adjustment is supported with previous studies as well- issues with communication, issues with in laws which is well significant factor of marital dissolution in India, engaging in adultery, male partner having addiction issues. However, few female participants going through divorce reported of abandonment and violence from husband and in laws associated with gender of the child born to them. They reported disappointment of family members with birth of female child which worsened if the second child born to them is girl as well. As several studies suggest high marital adjustment to be linked with androgenous roles (Isaac & Shah, 2024), communication (ST Janetius, 1998) which was supported by participants of the present study. Few participants reported association of child related factors with marital adjustment as well.

2] It was found that there was no statistically significant difference in scores of reasons for living in between groups which was evident from p value of .367 that indicate that the test results have 36.7% probability of results yielded due to random chance. The mean rank of

## Comparative Study on Marital Adjustment, Reasons for Living and Suicide Risk in Married Individuals and People Going through Divorce

married individuals on reasons for living scored 49.01 and 43.99 for people into divorce. Although the mean rank is slightly higher in married people, it is not statistically significant and both groups have moderate level of reasons for living.

It was hypothesized that reasons for living will be higher in married individuals than people going through divorce. The study findings reject this hypothesis. We speculate that this might be due to inclusive criteria of participants having at least one child which was also supported by participants through personal data sheet. It was observed that child related concerns and responsibility towards family were common important factors in both the sample groups. Surviving and coping beliefs also were common in both the groups. An interesting take in the present study is that even though people reported moderate to low reasons for living, they reported no suicide risk. Association of reasons for living with suicide risk has a tricky outcome in the present study. Given the items of reasons for living scale were thought provoking and people going through divorce reported high distress, they might have conformed to give socially desirable answers.

The results of people going through divorce process being contrary to expectations might be because of resilient factors, support from family, sense of purpose, responsibility of child and their own moral values that protect them from being suicidal. It is also noteworthy that where females had parents, children and self as their motivating factor in life, males reported it to be with parents and work supported by personal datasheet. The association of social support, sense of purpose has also been supported by various existing literature on reasons for living. (Mei-Chuan Wang, 2007, 2013)

3] Planned comparisons revealed that there was higher risk of suicide in people going through divorce as compared to married people. The result is supported with mean rank of suicide risk being higher in People going through divorce with the score of 51.05 and mean rank score in married people to be 41.95 which is significant .007 level which is greater than .005. This indicates that the result is statistically significant.

The hypothesis planned was there will be no significant difference on suicide risk in married and people going through divorce and given there is significant difference, the claimed hypothesis stands rejected. The personal data sheet supports the finding as there was multiple distress areas in people going through divorce and high levels of distress experienced in them. As per Interpersonal theory of suicide (Joiner, 2005), the participants going through divorce had immense psychological pain significantly regarding their marriage, family dynamics, life after divorce, responsibility of child, finance. The history taking on suicidality in participants revealed that 10.87% of participants had lost someone to suicide in past, 14.13% of participants reported self-harm, 9.8% reported to have past suicide attempt.

The quality of suicide risk assessment in married people is low, i.e, they have desire to die or get suicidal thoughts whereas people going through divorce reported ideation, intent and plans as well. This suicide risk may also be associated with loneliness in people going through divorce, given people who had support from their family, were living with them, engaged in self-care activities report no risk of suicide whereas, individual living alone, away from child, perceived burdensomeness reported high scores on suicide rating scale.

There also is a possible chance of suicide risk being underreported as on ground level, there is still social stigma and shame associated to mental health and suicide. The participants

## Comparative Study on Marital Adjustment, Reasons for Living and Suicide Risk in Married Individuals and People Going through Divorce

reported believed suicide to still be an offense and they feared being jailed as previously suicide was criminal offense in India which was later decriminalized in Mental Healthcare Act, 2017. There was also a discrepancy in participants who reported high distress, hopelessness, pessimistic attitudes towards life and reported no suicide ideation when they scored less moderate on reasons for living scale contradictory to previous studies who linked hopelessness as indicator of suicide (Britton, 2008).

Overall, the findings of the study yielded promising results, it was successful in identifying, assessing and supporting people at risk, exploring protective beliefs in the sample which can be useful in designing prevention strategies, provide support at community level. The findings are statistically sound as asymptomatic significance is displayed at 0.05 level.

### CONCLUSION

This study examined marital adjustment, protective beliefs as in reasons for living and suicide risk in married and people in divorce process in Pune. There are 3 significant findings of this research: a) The results indicate that there is higher marital adjustment in married individuals; b) The reasons for living are moderate in both the groups of married people as well as people going through divorce; c) There is higher risk of suicide in people who are going through divorce process. The most relevant reasons for living in both groups were surviving and coping beliefs, responsibility towards family and child related concerns.

#### *Future suggestions for the study:*

1. Importance of children as a significant protective factor in reasons for living in married adults. Future research can do this by comparing within groups of people with child and without child.
2. It has been observed that duration of divorce process may also play important factor in suicidality as on ground many participants reported having suicidal ideation in initial days of getting into divorce.
3. Suicide risk exploration in this study was related to during this month; future researches may explore suicidality in past 6 months or lifetime wise.
4. Further research can also include family environment as an associative factor in suicide risk.

#### *Ethical Consideration:*

1. Participants of the study were provided with detailed consent form informing about nature of the study and were assured confidentiality which was strictly maintained throughout the time.
2. Individuals with high distress were provided with immediate listening space, emotional support and directed them to professional help as needed.
3. A list of referrals containing of distress/ suicide helplines, mental health organizations, psychologists, counsellors in different areas of Pune was provided to all participants and also to the lawyers to circulate.

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**Comparative Study on Marital Adjustment, Reasons for Living and Suicide Risk in Married Individuals and People Going through Divorce**

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## Comparative Study on Marital Adjustment, Reasons for Living and Suicide Risk in Married Individuals and People Going through Divorce

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

There were no conflicts of interest declared in the study.

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