

## **Relationship Self-Regulation and Dyadic Coping in Married Women: Role of Demographic Factors**

**Iqra Ijaz, Aisha Zubair, and Qudsia Saeed**

Quaid-i-Azam University

The present study attempted to investigate the predicting influence of relationship self-regulation in dyadic coping among married women. In addition, role of demographic factors such as education, employment status of married women, and family system were also determined in relation to study variables. The sample comprised of 300 married women with age ranging from 22 to 38 years (Mean age = 28.77) with at least two years of marital duration. Measures of Behavioral Self-Regulation for Effective Relationships Scale (Wilson, Charker, Lizzio, Halford, & Kimlin, 2005) and Dyadic Coping Inventory (Bodenmann, 2008) were used to assess the study variables. Findings showed that relationship self-regulation positively predicted better dyadic coping. Results of multivariate analysis inferred that working married women being highly educated and living in nuclear setup reported better relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping. However, nonsignificant differences were found in relation to spousal education and duration of marriage. Implications for future research and practical intervention strategies for couple therapists and educators were also discussed.

*Keywords.* Relationship self-regulation, dyadic coping, married women

With the growing complexity of marriage and family, there is abundant literature on marital relationships and marital quality and an emerging understanding of how marriage might influence the health and wellbeing of its constituents in the Western world. In Pakistan, on the other hand, despite the universality of marriage, there is dearth of literature on marital relationship and understanding of relationship quality and their potential linkages with dyadic coping and wellbeing. Most of the current native studies (Rahman, 2020; Shokri, Rahmani, & Abolghasemi, 2020) on marital relationships have neglected to understand emotional processes and other couple relational factors

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Iqra Ijaz, Aisha Zubair and Qudsia Saeed, National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Aisha Zubair, National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: aishazubair@nip.edu.pk

within marriage that could be linked to health and wellbeing (Randall & Falconier, 2018). Dyadic relations are fostered by numerous factors such as personal traits, cognitive and affective states, as well as relationship quality indicators (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2019). Dyadic relations affect both partners directly or indirectly and trigger a shared coping endeavor as it involves the interdependence of the partners, shared concerns, and shared purposes which stimulate a resolving of the problems together and shared activities aimed at emotional balance (Dunlop, 2019; Moilanen & Manuel, 2018; Robles, Slatcher, Trombello, & McGinn, 2019).

Relationship self-regulation is conceptualized as the individual work one does in a close relationship to think about, set, implement, and adjust goals that lead to relationship maintenance and improvement so that marital satisfaction may increase (Constant et al., 2020). In order to display social competence and create healthy relationships, exceptional self-regulation skills are important (Molden, Lucas, Finkel, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2019) which means that relationship self-regulation is usually thought of as an individual process; however, researches (Meier, Bodenmann, Mörgeli, & Jenewein, 2019; Moilanen & Manuel, 2018; Sallay, Martos, Chatfield, & Dúll, 2019) have documented that there is also an interpersonal dimension which laid the ground for positive association between relationship self-regulation based strategies, effort and relationship satisfaction.

Research has shown that couples who work toward specific, actionable goals to improve their relationship have significantly higher levels of long-term relationship satisfaction (Zarastvand, Tizdast, Khalatbari, & Abolghasemi, 2020). Regardless of relationship type, relationship self-regulation has been firmly empirically established to relate to relationship satisfaction (Wunderer & Schneewind, 2018) and found to be salient predictor of relationship success (Constant et al., 2020), relationship quality (Vaske et al., 2020) and relationship satisfaction (Rivers & Sanfors, 2018). The idea of relationship self-regulation stem from Aswathy and Kalpana (2019) deliberated that self-regulation and self-control. The processes of relationship self-regulation are initiated when routinized activity is impeded or when goal-directedness is otherwise made salient, for example, appearance of a challenge, the failure of habitual action patterns (Sheldon, Cheng, & Hilpert, 2018).

The theory conceptualizes dyadic coping as a coping process in which both partners are involved; consequently, recognizes the mutuality and interdependence in coping responses to a specific shared stressor. In line with this, dyadic coping has been defined by

Carver, Scheier, and Fulford (2020) as a stress management process in which partners either ignore or react to each other's stress signal in order to maintain or return to homeostasis on the individual level, the couple level and the extramarital level. Similarly, to Lazarus and Folkman's (as cited in Falconier, Randall, & Bodenmann, 2019) transactional paradigm of stress and coping, Bodenman's theory of dyadic coping conceptualizes and measures coping as a dynamic and transactional stress management process (Balsam, 2021). However, dyadic coping involves managing the stress experienced by both partners in the intimate relationship (Herbert, Bonnen, Asper, & Wagner, 2018). As the definition outlines, a result of this is that the coping efforts enacted by partners may vary. that is, as partners aspire to maintain well-being both at the individual level and the relationship level, this may lead them to find it necessary to either ignore or react to the demanding scenarios (Hofmann, Finkel, & Fitzsimons, 2020).

Beyond the study of dyadic coping in specific life contexts and the link to general relationship satisfaction, there is albeit less deeply studied domain of investigation that is the connection of dyadic coping to processes of self-regulation, primarily goal striving (Papp & Witt, 2020). Partners' initial appraisals of a situation and available resources activate relationship goals in partners and, in turn, these goals as general action tendencies influence actual dyadic coping behavior (Molden et al., 2019; Randall & Falconier, 2018; Robles et al., 2019). Moreover, the accomplishment of these goals is often accompanied by the experience of strain (Sheldon et al., 2018) and, in the relationship; the emergence of these stress experiences requires joint dyadic efforts. Therefore, dyadic coping processes may play a role in the successful accomplishment of personal goals by helping with (or hindering) the effective management of goal-related challenges (Carver et al., 2020). The relationship between relationship self regulation and dyadic coping is considered long-standing, as evidenced by results from a longitudinal study indicating that couples high in marital satisfaction displayed more positive supportive dyadic coping and common dyadic coping than did couples who were separated or divorced (Xu, Hilpert, Randall, Li, & Bodenmann, 2019).

### **Role of Demographic Factors**

Impact of various demographics in context of relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping has been extensively investigated. For instance, dyadic coping in romantic relationships is found to be influenced by factors such as education, employment, having children, and vocational skills (Fallahchai, Fallahi, Chahartangi, & Bodenmann 2019; Kuster et al., 2019). Recently, Martos et al. (2021) in

understanding the relational aspects of dyadic coping acknowledge the role of psychosocial factors such as duration of marriage, education, age difference between couples, and nature of job. Dyadic stress, dyadic coping and relationship quality has been extensively found associated with residential facilities, family size, and partner's health among dual career couples (Badr et al., 2020; Pihet & Kayser, 2019). In addition, a higher level of relationship self-regulation and marital satisfaction is reported by working married women having small family size (Sim, Cordier, Vaz, Parsons, & Falkmer, 2018) and partner's reactions are favorably expressed by married men and women with better educational and occupational skills (Vedes, Nussbeck, Bodenmann, Lind, & Ferreira, 2019). Similarly, supportive and delegated acts of dyadic coping are classified as positive by both married couples and never-married partners having small family size, employed, and living together (Molden, et al., 2019) and partners with sound occupational and monetary status (Lameiras, Marques-Pinto, Francisco, Costa-Ramalho, & Ribeiro, 2018). Moreover, relationship satisfaction in terms of general and subjective evaluation of one's own relationship experiences and corresponding dyadic coping process is rigorously associated with social demographics such as education, work schedule, employment, and availability of social support (e.g., Breitenstein, Milek, Nussbeck, Davila, & Bodenmann, 2018; Gere & Schimmack, 2018; Hofman et al., 2020; Meier et al., 2019; Robles et al., 2018), adequate monetary and supportive logistics (Traa, De Vries, Bodenmann, & Den-Oudsten, 2019).

On indigenous front, multiple studies have been conducted which provide a native insight about study variables. For instance, Ahmed and Iqbal (2019) deliberated that married women with depressive symptoms tend to have a more silenced self and are less adjusted in their marriage than women without depression. This implies that depression is linked to a decreased ability to convey one's emotions, desires, wants, needs and opinions. Not only does this affect the married women's psychological health but also disrupts their marital relationship by diminishing the mutual bond and affecting dyadic satisfaction. Rahman (2020) conducted study on dual career couples found that the emotional and psychological competence and high-quality problem-solving skills of the couples are helpful for achieving the level of marital happiness, marital togetherness, and marital communication. On the other hand, negative emotional responses, lack of problem-solving skills and social indifference on the part of the couples may potentially harm their marital satisfaction, communication, marital intimacy and over all marital quality of dual career couples. Naeem, Aqeel, and de-Almeida (2021) piloted study

on madrassa married and non-married women found that married women with marital conflict, self-silencing experienced a noteworthy high risk of psychiatrist problems including mood swings, stress, anxiety, depression and dissociation in Pakistani context. Moreover, this study also suggested that marital conflict is associated higher level of self-silencing, depression and dissociation in married women. Additionally, Rahman (2020) asserted that married women express differential levels of marital quality and dyadic coping in dual career couples living in diverse family setups. This study highlighted that new prevention and interventions could be developed in Pakistani context to marital issues and mental health problems of married women.

Most studies majorly focus on body image but there was scarcity of empirical investigation regarding feedback on physical appearance and its impact on dyadic relationships. Dyadic coping and relationship self-regulation are important elements of marital relationships. In consideration with these concerns, the present study seeks to address such gaps in existing literature by exploring the association between relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping. In addition, prior studies majorly focus on the investigation of these constructs in context of normative comparison groups (e.g., cancer patients) or clinical groups (e.g., disordered eating); however, lesser attention is paid to the role of various demographics which would have played pivotal role in influencing the dyadic coping. Therefore, the broader objectives of the present study were to explore the role of relationship self-regulation in dyadic coping among married women. It was also attempted to determine the role of various demographics (educational level of women, spousal education, and marriage type) in relation to study variables among married women.

## **Hypotheses**

Following hypotheses has been formulated for the present study:

1. There is a positive relationship between relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping.
2. Employed married women being highly educated and living in nuclear family setup would reflect better relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping as compared to their counterparts.

## Method

### Sample

A purposive sample comprised of married women ( $N = 300$ ) with age ranged from 22 to 38 years ( $M = 28.77$ ,  $SD = 5.41$ ). Education of respondents included graduation ( $n = 153$ ) and post-graduate ( $n = 147$ ), whereas respondents included both working ( $n = 140$ ) and non-working women ( $n = 160$ ) living in nuclear ( $n = 170$ ) and joint ( $n = 130$ ) family settings. In order to control confounding effect of duration and type of marriage, inclusion criteria were specified by taking only those married women in the sample who have been married for at least two years and reported to have arranged marriage only.

### Instruments

#### **Behavioral Self Regulation for Effective Relationships Scale.**

A 16 item Behavioral Self Regulation for Effective Relationships Scale (BSRERS; Wilson et al., 2005) is a self-report measure of the extent to which individual partners self-regulate their relationships. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert type scale, ranged from 1 (*never true*) to 5 (*always true*) with possible score range from 16 to 80 and high scores on this scale reflected better relationship self-regulation. It has two subscales namely Strategies and Perseverance with 8 items in each subscale, while cumulative score reflect the overall relationship self regulation. Original authors reported adequate reliability (.88) of the total scale; while alpha coefficient of .81 has been acquired for the total BSRERS in the present study.

**Dyadic Coping Inventory.** The Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI; Bodenmann, 2008) is a 35-item scale designed to measure perceived dyadic coping (supportive, delegated, negative, and joint) that occurs in close relationships when one or both partners are stressed. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very rarely*) to 5 (*very often*). The total DCI score could range from 35 to 175 and high score indicate better dyadic coping. Psychometric evaluation of the DCI reported satisfactory index of internal consistency (.89; Bodenmann, 2008); whereas, in present study, Cronbach's alpha of .86 is achieved for the total DCI.

### Procedure

Participants were approached individually both at their homes through social contacts and group reference. Initially informed consent was obtained from the participants, and they were briefed

about the purpose of study. Respondents were also assured of the confidentiality of any personal information shared during data sharing process and anonymity of their identity. Questionnaire booklet was administered on individual basis; while, both written instructions as well as verbal narrations were given to the participant so as to minimize the ambiguity and enhance the clarity regarding the completion of questionnaires. In addition, respondents were requested to respond on both questionnaires in context of their relations with their spouses. Afterwards they were thanked for their cooperation and provision of valuable information.

## Results

Pearson product moment correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping. It has been found that relationship self-regulation is positively related with dyadic coping ( $r = .41, p < .00$ ). In addition, Multiple Linear Regression is tabulated to determine the role of demographics along with relationship self-regulation to predict dyadic coping (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Multiple Linear Regression for Predicting Dyadic Coping (N = 300)*

Predictors	B	S.E	$\beta$	Criterion Variable: Dyadic Coping			
				$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	F	$\Delta F$
<b>Model 1</b>							
Constant	22.45	1.59		.20	.18	24.80***	22.23***
Relationship Self Regulation	.52	.06	.37*				
<b>Model 2</b>							
Constant	41.67	1.15		.31	.29	123.38***	120.01***
Education	.64	.08	.28**				
Employment Status	.49	.05	.30**				
Family System	.92	.03	.24*				
Duration of Marriage	.22	.00	.13				
Spousal Education	.19	.01	.09				

\*  $p \leq .01$ . \*\*  $p \leq .00$ .

Results of multiple linear regression shows that relationship self-regulation overall explain 18% of the variance in dyadic coping. In addition, education of respondents, work status, and family system significantly positively predicted better dyadic coping and accounted for 29% of the variance in criterion variable.

**Table 2***Multivariate Analysis on Demographic Factors Along Study Variables (N = 300)*

Variables	Education				Employment Status				Family System				95%CI				
	Graduate (n = 153)		Post-Graduate (n = 147)		Housewife (n = 160)		Employed (n = 140)		Joint (n = 130)		Nuclear (n = 170)						
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p	$\eta^2$	LL	UB
RSR	39.96	11.75	42.07	12.62	53.56	10.19	58.29	11.92	47.10	10.15	51.10	11.88	28.06	.00	.11	11.69	19.43
DC	81.64	8.96	85.40	9.18	93.28	8.56	98.75	10.75	101.53	9.20	108.24	6.32	17.17	.00	.09	10.87	15.91

*Note.* Wilk's  $\lambda = 4.06$ ; RSR = Relationship Self-Regulation; DC = Dyadic Coping.



Group differences are tabulated across education, employment status, family system, duration of marriage and spousal education. As significant group differences are found on the demographics of education, employment status, and family system of married women; therefore, on parsimonious grounds multivariate analysis is computed to determine the combined effect of all these demographics across study variables (see Table 2). However, nonsignificant group differences are found on duration of marriage and spousal education.

Results depicted in Table 2 reveal that married women being highly educated (with post-graduation qualification), having regular jobs in organizations, and living in nuclear family setup express significantly higher levels of relationship self-regulation and better dyadic coping as compared to their counterparts. It has also been found that values of  $\eta^2$  are reasonably moderate indicating the medium effect size. This provides further evidence that these group differences are adequately reflective of the population from which the sample of this study is drawn. In addition, dispersion of mean values of each group and subgroup lies in the average range of the scale scores; thereby indicating that sample is optimally normally distributed.

## **Discussion**

The main objective of the current study is to investigate the association between relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping among married women. In addition, role of demographic characteristics is also examined. Results of the present study indicated a significant positive relationship between relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping. These findings can be optimally explained in accordance to earlier literature which has shown that relationship adjustment quality positively predicted dyadic coping (Aswathy & Kalpana, 2019), partner happiness, and marital satisfaction (Badr et al., 2020). The probable reason of self-regulation to act as a determining factor has been established through various studies depicting that it is associated with augmented levels of environmental mastery (Kuster et al., 2019), personal growth (Moilanen & Manuel, 2018), and positive relational tendencies (Constant et al., 2020). Moreover, it has been found that relationship self-regulation assisted the individual to utilize all the cognitive, affective, and behavioral resources to make suitable adjustments in peer and dyadic relations (Gouin, Scarcello, da Estrela, Paquin, & Barker, 2019). Likewise, Balsam et al. (2021) asserted based on longitudinal study that predictors of dyadic happiness and adjustment is contingent upon the better relationship self-regulation; conversely, poor relational self-

regulation may result in dyadic dissolution among same-sex and heterosexual couples.

Furthermore, finding revealed that married women being highly educated, employed and living in nuclear family setup exhibited elevated levels of relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping. These findings can be best understood in the backdrop of theoretical assumptions of Carver, et al., (2020) asserting that demographics play an important role in determining self-regulatory processes, stress, and coping which would bear enduring impact on both the antecedents and outcomes of dyadic coping in close personal relationships. In addition, psychosocial factors such as employment status, spousal education, family dynamics, and having children serve as crucial precursors in shaping the relational pathways in dyadic outcomes. A handful set of studies (Bradbury & Pihet, 2020; Zarastvand, et al., 2020) revealed that women (both unmarried and married) equipped with better academic skills are likely to sustain proactively to partner's affective and social needs. On similar note, Donato, et al., (2018) stated that women having good scholastic and educational capabilities can cope through thick and thin in their marital journey and respond positively to perceived partner stress in case of negative events.

Findings based on multivariate analysis depicted that employed women exhibit better relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping as compared to housewives. Considerable importance has been given to employment status of women and its relation to the psychosocial outcomes. For instance, Gere and Schimmack (2018) found that working married women positively cope in case of goal conflict of romantic partners and also display augmented better relationship quality with higher levels of subjective well-being. Similarly, Martos, et al., (2021) deliberated that employed women reflect better dyadic coping in personal projects of romantic partners and higher relationship satisfaction. Papp and Witt (2020) offer reasonable explanation for employed women in relational coping by stating that employment itself stands as a protective factor to enhance the cognitive and affective functioning as well as financial assurance for women, which, in turn, enhances the overall relationship functioning, general health, and virtuous adjustment skills in romantic relations. Regan et al. (2018) examined salient variables such as women career success, self-esteem and well-being with explicitly interactions among work, support and family variables (e.g., job involvement, family involvement) and found that employed married women reported more dyadic satisfaction and relational harmony. In addition, Herbert et al. (2018) further endorsed these assertions stating that women who are employed on frequent basis shared economic security are less

distressed which helps them in combating emotional insecurities in their dyadic relationships; thereby enhancing the improved dyadic relations.

Further results indicated significant differences on family system revealing that married women living in nuclear set up display better relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping as compared to those residing in joint family settings. These findings can be appropriately captured in the native perspective, as indigenous studies (Rahman, 2020; Shokri et al., 2020) declared that married women living in nuclear setup reported higher tendencies of forgiveness and emotional self-regulation; while those residing in extended family scenarios are inclined to marital boredom of couples seeking divorce. In addition, Abbas et al. (2019) asserted that married females living with in-laws shared elevated higher levels of marital discord associated with depression and stress despite the availability of social support. Later, Naeem et al. (2021) found that higher levels of marital conflict, self-silencing, dissociation, and depression are reported by both married madrasa and non-madrasa women living in joint family system.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

As the current study bear certain potential limitations; therefore, relative suggestions are recommended for future investigations. Firstly, sample of the present study is comprised of only married women and hence, lack the perspective of spouses in relation to study variables. This may limit the generalizability of findings of the present study; however, future endeavors may opt for the married couples to capture the holistic picture of the phenomenon. Secondly, employing qualitative research techniques may offer deeper and insightful understanding regarding precursors and outcomes of dyadic coping. Thirdly, future studies may acquire sample of married women living in diverse areas (urban and rural) which would influence the interplay of the study variables. Finally, other related psychological constructs such as marital satisfaction, work family conflict, personality traits, resilience, creativity, and optimism would be investigated in relation to study variables to encompass a broader understanding of the dyadic experiences.

### **Implications**

Findings of the present research highlight the underpinnings of demographics in context of relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping. Therefore, derivations of this study would be applicable in the

fields of marital counseling and couple therapy to enhance the role spousal support and assistance in childcare. In addition, findings could be used as baseline information for incorporating the imperative role of demographics in socialization practices of parents and teachers. In lieu of the previous consideration, upright stances of these demographics could be highlighted in educational curricula to build more harmonious social fabric of our society. This, in turn, would be assistive in building foundations of trusted, healthier, and sustainable dyadic relations

### Conclusion

The present study demonstrated that there was a significant positive role of relationship self-regulation in dyadic coping among married women. It has been found that married women being highly educated, employed and living in nuclear family settings displayed augmented levels of relationship self-regulation and dyadic coping.

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