

EXPLORATION OF MARITAL FLOURISHING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MARRIED COUPLES

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article History:</i> Received: 11 Jan 2020 Revised: 10 Mar 2020 Accepted: 05 May 2020 Available Online: 30 Jun 2020</p> <hr/> <p><i>Keywords:</i> Flourishing, Marriage, Qualitative Analysis, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.</p> <hr/> <p><i>JEL Classification:</i> J12, K36</p>	<p>The current phenomenological study explored marital experiences of Pakistani couples to investigate the factors leading to a flourishing marital life. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews that were digitally recorded and transcribed. The sample included 14 couples who were married for more than ten years. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was applied to explore the qualitative data. Two major clusters emerged from the couples' descriptions of their marital flourishing: Personality Cluster and Relationship Cluster. The clusters was further divided that included: Commitment and Loyalty, Respect, Patterns of Communication, Degree of closeness and intimacy with the partner, Spousal support and encouragement, Interactional Styles during Conflict, Self Compassion, Ability to regulate Emotional Reactions, Capitalizing on Positive Events, Humor, Expressing love for the partner. Study has implications for Family Research Analysts working at Mental Health Solace and Pakistan Council on Family Relations. Counselors working with couples and positive psychologists can also benefit from present research.</p>

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1. INTRODUCTION

The literature on marital relationship found in psychology has begun to undergo a radical transformation. While marital relationship was previously almost entirely limited to conflict and problem solving, recent studies have begun to focus on relationship quality and satisfaction. Marital quality has become a hot topic among relationship researchers. While, an abundance of literature has emerged bearing the concepts such as a happy marriages, satisfying marriages, marriage stabilities, marital adjustment, and successful marriage; one relatively new concept to label the optimum quality of the marriage is marital Flourishing. A flourishing marriage has been regarded as the highest quality of a marriage that is characterized by husband's and wife's collaborative and meaningful activities aimed to achieve relationship goals (Fowers & Owenz, 2010). Conceptions of what constitutes a flourishing relationship are numerous and differ from one another. However, regardless of the essentials of different understandings, relationship flourishing requires doing or being well in the following five broad domains of human life: (1) life satisfaction; (2) mental and physical health; (3) purpose in life; (4) character and virtue; and (5) close social relationships. All are possibly at least a part of what could be regarded as flourishing (e.g. Rayan & Desi, 2001).

The word flourishing in a husband-and-wife relation is not simply happiness, satisfaction, and adjustment instead; it labels a relationship that is emotionally vital; and is considered as intimacy, growth, resilience, positive experience and dynamic balance in terms of marital relationship as well as other families' subsystems (Fincham & Beach, 2010). Likewise, a flourishing marital relationship is not just shown by feelings of happiness or satisfaction of a couple; moreover, a flourishing marriage can be acquired if the couple possess relationship building traits such as loyalty, generosity, compassion, and sincerity. In addition, the couple is acting in a way that is mutually enjoying and tends to connect with each other in a consistent and regular manner. A flourishing marriage, therefore, is not merely to satisfy spouse, but also enabling each other to be capable of expressing good traits and doing happy things to each other in a contented life (Nurhayati, 2016).

Existing literature depicts empirical studies that highlight the factors that could mark a marital relationship as happy, satisfied and adjusted. For instance, Fenell (1993) identified 10 most important characteristics for a satisfied marital relationship; which included (1) commitment to marriage, (2) faithfulness to spouse, (3) moral values, (4) respect for spouse, (5) commitment, sexual fidelity, (6) desire to be a good parent, (7) spiritual commitments, (8) desire to please and support spouse, (9) good companion to partner, and (10) willingness to forgive and be forgiven.

Similarly, Goodman (1999), recognized sharing problems, and desires to satisfy the partner proved to be the most significant positive predictor of marital satisfaction.

Likewise, Bachand and Caron, (2001) carried out a qualitative research in which 15 couples were interviewed who were happily married for at least 38 years. Focus of their research was to seek the viewpoint of those who involved in happy marriages. They found some of the contributing factors to satisfied marriage were unique to each couple like friendship, love, and same backgrounds. Correspondingly, Rapkin (1999) took a qualitative method to explore the variables contributing to stability and happiness in long-term marriages among Quaker couples who had been married for at least 20 years. She found the following themes like gender equity, communication, conflict, roles, relatedness, decision making, intimacy, and satisfaction with the relationship. Likewise, similarity of attitudes, values, and beliefs were also found to be related to marital satisfaction and happiness (Holman & Larson, 1994). As the preceding discussion implies, Wood and Stroup, (1990) suggested that the role of the individual in their family system is a significant predictor of marital satisfaction. Sullivan, (2001) concluded that religiosity also had an impact on attitude towards divorce, commitment, and help seeking attitude among couples.

1.1 Purpose of Study

Despite the fact that numerous studies have revealed the factors that could contribute to marital happiness (e.g. Fatima & Asir, 2012; Yucel & Koydemir, 2015), marital flourishing is still ill defined at interpersonal level. Detailed indigenous exploration of flourishing is required to analyze the factors that are indispensable to call a relationship flourished or even flourishing. The present study, therefore, is exclusively designed to study the contributors of marital flourishing.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research design

This study used qualitative methodology to gain insight into the flourishing marriage by interviewing fourteen couples who share their personal experiences and observations related to marital flourishing. Qualitative method was used to explore flourishing of married individuals. Qualitative methods often yield extraordinarily rich data and exceed quantitative approaches for achieving comprehensive understanding of various constructs. Furthermore, there is little qualitative research that focuses on variables of marital quality (Matthews, 2005).

2.2 Instrument

Three key questions were developed to elicit barrier free conversation from the participants. Special care was taken while adjusting the language of the questions that it should be according to respondent's mental abilities and education level. Simple and understandable Urdu language was selected to formulate the inquiries. Probing words like *how*, *why*, *what u think*, *according to you* were selected to encourage verbalization of experiences (Bernard, 1995). Leading questions were avoided in order to allow people to answer in their own terms, values and experiences (Herman & Bentley, 1993). Logical Sequence of the questions was taken care of to encourage productive discussions. Marital flourishing was explored through following key questions:

Question 1: In your opinion, what is a flourishing marital life?

Question 2: Which elements are important for a flourishing marital relationship?

Question 3: Define traits of your personality that build a flourishing marital relationship?

2.3 Participants

Purposive sampling method was used to select the participants with maximum variation in age, number of marital years, parenthood status, education level, and employment status was assured (*Table 1*). Semi-structured interviews were completed with 14 married couples residing multiple cities of Pakistan. All couples were interviewed in a private room using open ended and flexible question. Each session of the interview lasted for 75 minutes to 120 minutes. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Traits of the Participants (n= 28).

		Age	Level of education	Profession	No. of Children	Years of Married life	Nature of Marriage	Family System
Couple 1	Husband	44	Intermediate	Business				
	Wife	39	Metric	Business	4	13	Love	Joint
Couple 2	Husband	54	PhD Scholar	Govt. Job	2	22		
	Wife	52	Intermediate	House wife			Love	Joint
Couple 3	Husband	35	Metric	Business	6	12		
	Wife	34	M.Phil.	Govt. Job			Love	Joint
Couple 4	Husband	63	PhD Scholar	Teacher	5	32		
	Wife	55	PhD Scholar	Teacher			Love	Joint
Couple 5	Husband	38	M.Phil.	Business	1	11		
	Wife	33	Intermediate	House wife			Love	Joint
Couple 6	Husband	53	PhD	Govt. Job	3	24		
	Wife	47	M.Phil.	House wife			Arrange	Joint
Couple 7	Husband	33	Metric	Business	3	13		
	Wife	27	Bachelors	Business			Arrange	Nuclear
Couple 8	Husband	45	Metric	Business	2	26		
	Wife	42	M.Phil.	Teacher			Arrange	Nuclear
Couple 9	Husband	69	Metric	Govt. Job	5	44		
	Wife	62	Intermediate	House wife			Arrange	Nuclear
Couple 10	Husband	38	M.Phil.	Teacher	2	13	Arrange	Nuclear
	Wife	39	PhD Scholar	House wife				
Couple 11	Husband	49	Diploma	Govt. Job	4	18		
	Wife	45	Metric	House wife			Love	Nuclear
Couple 12	Husband	58	Metric	Govt. Job	4	21		
	Wife	52	Metric	House wife			Love	Nuclear
Couple 13	Husband	63	Intermediate	Business	2	31		
	Wife	59	Metric	Teacher			Love	Nuclear
Couple 14	Husband	42	Diploma	Business	3	29		
	Wife	40	Intermediate	Teacher			Love	Joint

Note. Metric= Secondary School; Intermediate= 12 years of formal education; Bachelors= 14 years of formal education; M.Phil. 18 years of formal education; Govt.= Government Sector employment.

2.4 Reliability

As a means of safeguarding the consistency of the data, numerous steps were taken. Firstly, tape recordings were completed during each of the interviews as opposed to merely taking notes during the interviews. After completion of each interview, detailed notes about the interview were written so that impressions and related observational comments were as accurate as possible. Each couple was given a copy of the transcript from their respective interviews and requested to provide feedback about it. Out of fourteen couples, three couples identified minor changes that they desired to make to their transcripts. Each couple was also given the opportunity to read their narrative and make any changes or comments. Three of the fourteen couples stated that they desired minor changes to be made. These included additions to comments which assured the correctness of the produced document.

3. QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

3.1 Coding, Clustering & and Analysis

Data gathered through semi structured interviews to explore the concept of marital flourishing was subjected to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is consistent with the present research aims, as it is committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It is a phenomenological methodology in that concentrates on “exploring experience in its own terms” rather than attempting to reduce it to, predefined or overly abstract categories” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 1).

The following section describes a step-by-step approach to the analysis.

Step 1: Collection of information through in-depth semi-structured Interviews.

Data was collected through rigorous and detailed interaction with the participants of the study. An open ended list of questions was prepared keeping in view the objectives of the study. The researcher’s aim was to elicit detailed and first-person accounts of experiences of the phenomena under investigation. After collection of information during the sessions, the researcher indulged herself into the analysis of information gained through multiple readings.

Step 2: Multiple readings and making notes (reinterpretation of the material acquired through interactive discussions).

At this step, the researcher made notes about her reflections about the interview experience. Focus was laid on the content (what was actually being discussed), language used (features such as metaphors, symbols, repetitions, pauses), context, and initial interpretative comments. Some comments associated with personal reflexivity were also generated (e.g., how did personal characteristics of the interviewer, such as gender, age, social status, etc. affected the rapport with the participant).

Step 3: First Stage of Analysis: Looking for themes.

At this stage, the researcher explored her own reflection of the participant’s interpretations. At this stage, the researcher was faced with encountering hermeneutic circle (the part is interpreted in relation to the whole and the whole is interpreted in relation to the part). By the end of this stage, material emerged through qualitative analysis was converted into themes (*Table 2*).

Table 2. First stage of Analysis: Extracts from a table of quotes

Interview & Line number	Quotes	Code
C18. 23	I think my ability to understand, recognize and interpret my own emotional conditions can help a lot to comprehend emotional ups and downs of my partner.... When I am suffering from emotional problems, I try to refrain myself to communicate with my wife as it makes us fight.	Managing Emotions
D7. 56	Sometimes, low sense of self-esteem, feeling inferiority and lack of self-assurance gives birth to bad feelings about the relationship.... High self-concept	Level of Self Confidence
D32. 42 & 46	Me as a person thinks that too much seriousness and gravity regarding ordinary matters of life makes life bitter. I am habitual of creating small jokes that keeps her fresh & I wish I could take life in a lighter way without so much seriousness. I should laugh at minor issues and take them normal rather than to be serious. Fun in life makes life worth living.	Comedy and Funnies
E 27. 33	Life is all about ups and downs. No doubt, discomforts makes you hopeless but just a thought. . . just a thought.....that all is transient and good things are likely to occur, makes a huge difference. You become positive and optimistic. Believe me just a matter of changing your perception.	Hopefulness
E 57. 57	I’m resourceful, strong and capable... such positive thinking about your own self and actually consuming these capabilities to change situations influences married relationship in positive direction.	Relying on own Capabilities in matters of Life

Step 5: Coding Scheme of the themes for each case.

After transcribing the data, the researcher works closely with the text. As the analysis develops, the researcher catalogues the emerging codes, and begins to look for patterns in the codes (*Table 3*).

Table 3. Coding scheme exploring the core meanings of a flourishing relationship among married couples

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Regard & Reverence for the Partner	Attachment within the marital relationship	Social Comparison in terms of Money, Status	Obligations within extended families	Sacrifice
1.1 Despite conflicts, giving each other due respect.	2.1 If you can't be intimate with your partner, whether physically or emotionally- or both, you cannot expect to having a lasting relationship with your partner.	3.1 Comparing oneself with others give birth to the feeling of dissatisfaction with the present life.	4.1 Failure to please in laws exerts negative impact on the marital relationship.	5.1 Leaving one thing for the sake of another thing within the married relationship should not be driven by the feelings of selfishness.
1.2 Treating spouse in thoughtful and courteous way	2.2 Desire to kiss, hug and cherish the partner, learning the	Comparisons are powerful in shaping an individual's identity,	4.2 Matters of in laws should be of no concern for the couple	5.2 when one partner sacrifices as often as a pitcher bunting with a

	ways to please the partner.	motivation to improve themselves, self-esteem and overall satisfaction with their life.	and should not effect the couple either directly or indirectly.	runner on first and the other partner sacrifices almost never, the couple run into problems.
1.3	Avoid treating each other in rude and disrespectful ways, e.g., you do not engage in name calling, and do not insult or demean your spouse or partner.		4.3	It is challenging and put strain on family relationships, especially if the family struggles to get along well.
1.4	Giving regard to each other is far more important than giving love		4.4	Fulfilling obligations and expectations of the extended family is at the cost of one's couple's happiness and intimacy

Above coding scheme are few instances from the interviews conducted to explore flourishing.

Step 4: Identifying Subthemes based on Verbatim of Participants from each case.

The transformation of initial notes into themes is continued through the whole transcript. At this step, verbatim were cautiously analyzed and sub themes were identified that could be grouped together according to their similarity and conceptual connections (Table 4).

Table 4. Sub-themes emerged from one interview

Sub Themes	Verbatim	Participant	Page & Line Number
1. Capitalizing on Positive Events	“Less concentration on worries and problems of life and giving weightage to what is pleasant and positive make relationship flourishing”	Husband of Couple # 3	3.14
2. Forgiveness	Marital flourishing is all about ignoring and forgetting partner’s mistakes and forgiving each other from the core of heart”	Wife of Couple # 4	4.16
3. Appreciation	“I at once fall in love with my better half as he praises me and notices me”	Wife of Couple # 11	4.17
4. Communication	“When we have a rift and communication breaks, I feel as if our relationship is falling down. To me, exchange of feeling and thoughts is important in any case for a flourishing couple”	Husband of Couple # 9	5.8

*The full table contained > 27,000 words of verbatim with examples from every interview.

Step 6: Connecting the themes and making Clusters.

This stage involved looking for associations between emerging themes, grouping them together according to conceptual similarities and providing each cluster with a descriptive label. Themes were compiled for the whole transcript before looking for connections and clusters. A final list was comprised of numerous superordinate themes and subthemes (Table 5).

Table 5. Major Clusters and their Subordinate Themes Emerged as result of IP Analysis of Semi Structure Interviews

	Cluster 1: Relationship Factors	Cluster 2: Personality Factors	
	Respect	Humor	Expression of Love for the Partner
Mutual Understanding	Spending Time Together	Emotional Stability	Self-Reliance
Sacrifice	Submission to Spouse	Level of Self Esteem	Expectations from the partner
Friendly Relations	Interactional styles during Conflict	Optimism	Use of Personal Resources
Trust	Financial Stability	Capitalizing on Positive Events	Maturity of thoughts and emotions
Patience	Forgiveness	Gratitude	Sexual satisfaction
Appreciation	Family Structure	Religious Orientation	Personal Space
Communication Patterns	Encouragement & Support	Social Comparison	Respect for individual Differences
Type of Marriage	Degree of Closeness & intimacy with the partner	Anxiousness	Self Compassion
Commitment & Loyalty	Age at the time of marriage	Verbal & Non Verbal Expression of emotions	Ability to regulate emotional reactions
Common Interests of Couples	Frequency of romantic interactions	Education	
Relationship with in-laws	Celebration of Special days	Ability to Compromise	
Sharing of responsibilities			

Step 7: Writing up

This step was concerned with translating the themes into a narrative account. The table of themes was the basis for the account of the participants' responses, which took the form of the narrative argument interspersed with verbatim extracts from the transcripts to support the case. Care was taken to distinguish clearly between what the respondent said and the analyst's interpretation or account of it.

3.2 Results

Results indicated that for each couple the factors contributing to the marital flourishing were unique. Most common factors included friendship, trust, compromise, commitment, and sacrifice. Results section included themes categorized into two distinctive clusters; *Relationship Factors* and *Personality factors*, each comprising of twenty four and twenty two subthemes respectively.

4. DISCUSSION

This section of the article presents the findings in the context of current literature encompassing the factors of relationship flourishing and is distributed into three segments. In first segment, *Summary of the Study*, study's purpose and procedures are outlined. Next, in the segment titled, *Findings of the Present Research*, findings of the study are elaborated. The third segment, *The Present Study in Relation to the Literature*, explains the present study as it relates to existing body of relationship research.

4.1 Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that lead to a flourishing marriage. This study involved qualitative methodology via use of semi structured interviews. 14 married couples, married for more than ten years were interviewed using three key probing questions guideline. Respondents rigorously shared their subjective experience and opinions related to flourishing of marital relationship. Couples belonged to diverse social, educational and professional backgrounds and had great variance with regard to their age, duration of marriage and parenthood experience. Each session of the interview lasted for more than 70 minutes and information gained was subjected to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Data analysis through IPA involved transcription of interviews, evaluation of transcriptions, and constructing observational symbolizations throughout the interview and analysis process. Transcribed data was carefully and repeatedly read which was then followed by coding the data, categorizing the codes, and then identification of emerging themes. All the couples were rigorously involved to subjectively evaluate the recordings and latterly transcribed and coded data to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the qualitatively analyzed information. The couples were generally satisfied with the narratives and four of the fourteen couples asked for minor changes. Recommended changes were incorporated and concluded description of coded themes was

regarded as final version. The procedure of the study ended up with write up and final statement outlining the meanings integrated according to participants' experience.

5. FINDINGS OF PRESENT RESEARCH

Contributing factors to a Flourishing Marriage

Upon exploring the data when each of the couples discussed their own personal experiences and opinions regarding marital flourishing, distinct themes emerged. The emerged themes were categorized into two major clusters, titled, *Relationship Factors* and *Personality Factors* (Table 5). The clusters were formed based on the logical associations among the emerged themes.

5.1 Cluster 1: Relationship Factors

Relationship factors included: Commitment and Loyalty, Respect, Patterns of Communication, Degree of closeness and intimacy with the partner, Spousal support and encouragement, Interactional Styles during Conflict, Friendly relations, Mutual Understanding, Sacrifice, Trust, Patience, Appreciation for the partner, Type of Marriage, Common interests of the couple, Relationship with In-Laws, Sharing of Responsibility, Spending Time Together, Submission to the Will of Spouse, Financial Stability, Forgiveness, Family Structure, Age at the time of Marriage, Frequency of romantic interactions, Celebration of Special Days.

5.2 Cluster 2: Personality Factors

Whereas, Personality factors included: Ability to compromise, Humor, Emotional Stability, Level of Self Confidence, Optimism, Capitalizing on Positive Events, Gratitude, Religious Orientation, Social Comparison, Anxiousness, Verbal & Non Verbal Expression of emotions, Education, Expression of Love for the Partner, Self-Reliance, Expectations from the partner, Use of Personal Resources, Maturity of thoughts and emotions, Sexual satisfaction, Personal Space, Respect for individual Differences, Self Compassion, Ability to regulate Emotional Reactions. Research Questions asked (how couples define marital flourishing, what are the indicators of a flourishing marital life, what personality factors leads to marital flourishing) in an open-ended format and how couples responded to describe marital flourishing. A wide range of responses were recorded.

Upon being inquired about the factors essential for the marital flourishing, (Q1 & Q2) majority of all the fourteen couples regarded trust, patience, ability to compromise, sacrifice, common interests of the couples, spending time together and frequency of romantic interactions as crucial factors to construct a flourishing relationship. One of the spouse (*couple 5*) made statement as, "Everything is gone when trust is gone.....you are unable to live a prosperous life without having trust on each other....everything else could be compromised in marriage". Similarly, all the couples unanimously gave weightage to sacrifice as vital for a flourishing relationship. "We, as a couple, unable to flourish without sacrificing our desires, like and dislikes for the will of partner.... I have to give up a lot of things for the blessings of our marriage." Likewise, while describing compromise as significant factor for a flourishing relationship, many couples discussed it as a key to a flourishing marriage.

Several other factors included, Interactional Styles during Conflict with the spouse, Communication Patterns, Family structure, Sharing of Responsibilities and Spousal support and encouragement. In elaborating Communication as a vital ingredient of a flourishing relationship, one of the responded narrated that, *Choice of words is everything...no matter how good intentions you possess for each other, if the words are harsh and sarcastic, you are going to ruin your relationship*. Likewise, majority of participants expressed their agreement that Family Structure matters a lot when flourishing of a couple is being taken into account. Several couples regarded joint family system as a threat to the flourishing of marital dyad due to over involvement of the members of extended families; on the other hand, few regarded nuclear family system to be ineffective as the couple is naïve and unable to resolve their conflicts due to the lack of experience.

Moreover, attachment and intimacy, sharing of responsibilities between each other, expression and appropriate regulation of emotional responses during emotion eliciting and stressful situations, being thankful to the partner for his or her small efforts, being optimistic and hopeful during adversities of life, while complying with mutual respect, are among important factors in creating a flourishing interaction between married couples. Majority of the participants (nine out of fourteen) participants agreed on the importance of expression of love between couples to attain marital flourishing. Likewise, all the participants regarded trust as being indispensable for a flourishing relationship. Trusting partner had a close relationship with religious and spiritual beliefs. Couples, who knew their partners as religious persons, had believed them more in regard to the trust and commitment.

While discussing *personal factors* when striving to gain an indigenous understanding of marital flourishing, self-compassion, high level of self-esteem and low level of anxious feelings were communicated by the respondents as

influential factors that determine relationship flourishing. Couples who reported themselves to be self-compassionate (“*I am tolerant and nonjudgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies..... When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation*”). “*I rarely get obsessed and fixate on anything that's wrong*”) related their trait as a something positively influencing their marital relationship.

Moreover, as reported by a wife “*I am habitual of being dependent on my partner for a constant emotional fix and constant attention, I think I think inferior about myself*”. Similarly, according to a few couples inclination to “*Overthink and overanalyze his/her partner's words, expressions, actions, and constant doubts regarding his/her own competence in the relationship*”(anxious temperament) was marked a trait that could hamper flourishing among husband and wives.

5.3 Demographic Traits of the Participants and Factors of Flourishing

5.3.1 Age and Factors of Flourishing

In the present study, age range for respondent wives was between 27 to 62 years and for respondent husbands was between 33- 69 years. Vivid difference was observed among the respondents regarding *their* ages and their account of flourishing as a couple. For instance, for all the wives below thirty five years of age, marital flourishing predominantly was celebration of birthdays and Anniversaries with the spouse, having got love marriage, verbal and non-verbal expression of emotions and communication patterns with each other. Conversely, for female participants above thirty five to around sixty years of age, self –compassion, respect for individual differences and support from the partner was primarily vital for a flourishing relationship. Likewise, for husbands under fifty years, marital flourishing was mainly dependent upon commitment and loyalty from the partner and financial stability of the couple. While, for husbands above fifty years, maturity of thoughts and religious orientation was chiefly vital for a flourishing marital relationship.

5.3.2 Level of Education and Factors of Flourishing

The present study involved respondents having variance in their education level. Female respondents having education till 14 years of formal education, regarded expression of love for the partner, respect for the individual differences capitalizing on positive events and optimism as key to marital flourishing. Whereas, females up to Ph.D level of education regarded self-reliance, appropriate use of personal resources and interactional styles during conflict with the partner as relatively essential factors of marital flourishing.

5.3.3 Profession and Factors of Flourishing

Variability in responses was also observed among the participants with regard to their professions. Husbands and Wives who were committed to teaching professions showed congruence in their responses regarding marital flourishing and considered level of self-confidence, humor, and least expectations from the partner as key elements of flourishing. Moreover, house wife participants rigorously regarded appreciation from the spouse, sharing of responsibilities, relationship with in laws and religious orientation as primarily essential for a flourishing relationship.

5.3.4 Number of Children and Factors of Flourishing

Marital flourishing for couples having children in teenage was quite different from couples having small children. Likewise, having one child as compared to five children also showed diversity in responses regarding marital flourishing. The couples having one child, flourishing was gratitude, friendly relations and verbal and nonverbal expression of emotions. Conversely, couples having teenage daughters and sons regarded respect for individual differences, low level of anxiousness, social comparison, and religious orientation as more important factors regarding marital flourishing.

5.3.5 Years of Married Life and Factors of Flourishing

According to the qualitative data of the present study, conceptual understanding of flourishing is distinctively influenced by the duration of marital years. As the study includes the couples with minimum of ten years of marital experience, therefore, the couples are compared according to variability of their duration of marriage. Couples having experience of marital relationship less than twenty years defined their marital flourishing as mainly dependent upon forgiveness, appreciation, sexual satisfaction, personal space, respect and trust. Contrariwise, the couples who were married for more than twenty years, flourishing included, but not limited to, commitment and loyalty with the spouse, gratitude for the partner, maturity of thoughts and emotion and optimism regarding matters of life.

5.3.6 Nature of Marriage

In the middle of the entire participants of the study, nine out of fourteen couples were those whose marriages happen according to their own choice and prior liking for the partner (love marriage). Whereas, the remaining five couples tied their knots exclusively as a result of their parent's will and were totally strangers to each other before

getting into the marital relationship (arrange marriage). Both type of couples showed mixed responses when relating to marital flourishing. Surprisingly, a few couples of love marriage showed preference for arrange marriage with the reason that expectations are high in love marriages which are sometimes unable to be fulfilled. Couples having love marriage regarded ability to compromise, patience and forgiveness as key factors for a flourishing relationship. While, for the couple of arrange marriage, marital flourishing primarily was degree of closeness & intimacy with the partner, financial stability, sacrifice and humorous nature of the partner.

5.3.7 Family System

Nuclear and Joint family systems were also taken into account when the present study tried to gain an understanding of the construct of marital flourishing. Couples residing in joint family system gave slightly different responses when relating to opinions and experiences of marital flourishing. They regarded relation with in laws, ability to compromise, age at what they got married, capitalizing on positive events and gratitude as pivotal to relationship flourishing. On the other hand, according to couples of nuclear family system, a flourishing marriage is the combination of emotional stability, level of anxiety of the partner, common interest of the spouses, and frequency of romantic interaction with the partner.

5.4 Present Study in Relation to the Literature:

- Numerous themes that emerged through the present qualitative study related to marital flourishing shows consistency with the existing relationship literature. As aforementioned, this is the first ever qualitative study that encompasses the construct of flourishing with reference to married population of an eastern society, therefore, there is scarcity of empirical studies in this regard. However, a brief view of relationship literature is being analyzed here that emphasizes relationship building ingredients that eventually lead to the flourishing of married couples.
- Literature depicts that Sacrifice (Stanley, Whitton, Sadberry, Clements, & Markman, 2006), forgiving mistakes of each other (Fincham, Hall, & Beach, 2006), gratitude (McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2004), commitment between the couple (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2006), patterns of communication and degree of intimacy with the partner (Billingsley et al., 2005; Feeney, 2002), support and encouragement for each other (Lawrence et. al., 2008). Interactional Styles during Conflict (Chapin, Chapin, & Sattler, 2001), Friendly relations between the couple (Bachand et al. 2001), Trust, respect and appreciation for the partner (Sharlin, 1996), type of marriage (Arif & Fatima,), family structure (Bansal et al., 2014), age at the time of marriage (Glenn, Uecker, & Love Jr., 2010).), frequency of romantic interactions and time spent together (Johnson & Anderson, 2012) are important determinants of marital quality and the combination of these factors leads to a flourishing relationship between couples.
- Similarly, numerous other flourishing variables revealed through the present qualitative study that have also proven in former researches to have profound impact on marital relationship; include ability to compromise (Estrada, 2009), Humorous nature (Ziv & Gadish, 1989), emotional stability (Khalatbari, 2013), level of self esteem and financial stability (Lu, 2006), optimism (Rock, Steiner, Rand, & Bigatti, 2014), capitalizing on positive Events (Otto, Laurenceau, Siegel & Belcher, 2015), religious orientation (Curtis and Ellison, 2002) social comparison (LeBeau & Buckingham, 2008), level of anxiousness (Zaider, Heimberg, & Iida, 2010), verbal & non verbal expression of emotions (Fahd & Hanif, 2018), expectations from the partner (Johnson, 2015), sexual satisfaction (Billingsley et al., 2005), personal space (Crane & Griffin, 1983), self compassion (Neff & Beretvas, 2012) , and ability to regulate Emotional Reactions (Bloch, 2014).

5.5 Limitations & Implications

The current study delivers a welcome antidote to the earlier mentioned focus on the negative, and it is supportive in recognizing what may be contributors of marital flourishing among indigenous married sample. Implication of this study and its policy practices have been central concerns to those who work in this area; marital counselors, family therapists and scientists of positive psychology. Not surprisingly, it could also exert a profound impact in family life and the married couples who desire to live a successful married life. Perhaps because the work is largely descriptive, however, it has had a limited impact in the empirical research literature. Development of systematic empirical research informed by marital flourishing model would be a welcome addition to the literature.

5.6 Directions for Future Research

Themes of marital flourishing emerged as the consequent of extensive qualitative data provided by the married couples could be utilized to device a psychological measure that could assess the flourishing of married individuals, an area that is lacking in the relationship literature.

5.7 Conclusion

The present study was designed to discover an in depth and exhaustive understanding of marital flourishing with reference to Pakistani husbands and wives. In spite of a few limitations this study, the study turned successful to give insight as to what factors contribute to a flourishing marital relationship. Using Qualitative responses of the 14 couples in this study indicate that multiple *Relationship* and *Personality* factors are woven intricately to form a flourishing marriage. Moreover, the study also vividly states that marital flourishing is acquired through concentrated effort of both the partners.

5.8 Ethical Considerations

This study is the part of first author's doctoral thesis. National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i- Azam University Ethics Committee has approved the study's proposal. All respondents were informed about the goals and methodology of the study. To record interviews, permission was acquired from the respondents. They were well informed that their participation in the study is voluntary, and they can leave at any time and at any stage of the research process. An informed consent form was duly signed by the participants who agreed with terms and conditions of the research.

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