

Marital Adjustment of Childless Couples

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KEYWORDS Infertility. Primary Infertility. Secondary Infertility. Pregnancy Wastage

ABSTRACT This study has been undertaken with a view to study the marital adjustment of those couples who are infertile. The sample of the study consisted of 30 childless women residing in urban areas of Jammu city and had marital duration of at least 10 years. Snowball sampling technique was adopted for sample selection. The tools used for the study were interview guide and Marital Adjustment Questionnaire. After analysis it was found that out of the total respondents, 77% were primary infertile, 10% had suffered experiences of pregnancy wastage and 13% were secondary infertile. It was found that before diagnosis of the problem 80% of the husbands had positive attitude but after diagnosis of the problem 20% of the husbands changed their attitude from positive to negative. Childlessness had great effect on the marital adjustment of the respondents and from the entire sample group it was found that different people have different styles for spending their leisure time. Women faced both physiological as well as psychological problems due to childlessness. The investigation of infertility may pose additional trauma, interfere intolerably with sex life and even erode the love a couple feel for each other. It was also found that with the increase in marital duration there was increase in marital adjustment.

INTRODUCTION

Marital adjustment is the process of modifying, adopting or altering individual and couple's pattern of behavior and interaction to achieve maximum satisfaction in the relationship. Studies have revealed greater unanimity of response between childless partners who may however have been tempted to idealize their relationship. It is also revealed that parenthood may limit the scope of communication between spouses. Childlessness may be stressful but it can also make for closer mutual affinity in the couple's thought and feeling (Humphrey 1975). The experience can stress a couple's personal relationship, diminish sexual satisfaction, deplete financial resources, and threaten perception of masculinity and femininity and cause psychological stress. The experience of infertility is unanticipated and to poor women with little or no education the failure to have any children would certainly lead to divorce or a remarriage on the part of the husband (Ahmed 1991). Research literature specifically examining the impact of infertility on marital adjustment is sparse and largely conceptual in nature. In the Garo tribe, it was found that the barrenness of the wife prompt the husband to take another wife as marriage among the tribal people is generally taken as successful only after bearing children. A man may opt for second marriage if the first wife is barren. Many a times a barren

wife herself encourages her husband to keep another wife in order to have children who would carry forward the family clan name (Mann 1996). Some of the discrepancies in results of research on infertility and marital satisfaction may be due to research procedures and testing issues. Motherhood also confers a special status to tribal women. She is like a fruit bearing tree. Even among Toda of Nilgiri hills, where the women hold a decidedly low position than the male, a mother is considered superior in status as compared with other women. As soon as the child is born, the marriage between a man and a woman is considered successful. It proves the versatility of man and fertility of a woman. A sterile woman is not looked upon with favor and in such a case man is free to marry again without divorcing the barren wife (Sharma 1998). Research indicated that many couples facing infertility go through a series of reactions similar to those found in other grief and crisis experiences i.e. few infertile couples reported maladjustment. Both husband and wife of infertile group were found engaged in music, games and other activities (Solanki 2001), some basic reactions include denial, anger, isolation, guilt and depression. Most authors agree that there is no set order to the reactions and that revisiting phases in common for those struggling with infertility. In term of coping, infertile men appear to engage in denial, distancing and avoidance, which may conflict with their partner's coping

strategies. All the infertile women experienced negative social consequences including marital instability, stigmatization and abuse, these findings demonstrate that infertility can have a serious effect on both the psychological well-being and social status of women in the developing World (Hyer et al. 2002). The research literature on infertility and marital relationship uses two terms to describe the marriage: Marital adjustment and Marital satisfaction. The concept of marital adjustment is used to define the process that couples use to achieve a harmonious and functional marital relationship.

It is a great tragedy that 9.9% of childless woman were from India (1996: Census of Housing and Population) and it is a psychologically and physically challenging stressful life event. Since not too much of research has been done on this topic, the need arises to study the magnitude of the problem on the affected couple. The dissolution rate of marriages in childless couples is 74% and they are very vulnerable. Keeping this as a background, the present study aims to investigate the impact of childlessness on marital adjustment of childless couples residing in urban areas of Jammu (Jammu and Kashmir). An attempt has been made to study the causes of childlessness and its effects on the childless couples. Though in the present study, we also intend to find if Marital Adjustment and Life Satisfaction are related or not, and it will further help in providing information to related agencies i.e. infertility clinics and counseling centers to deal with the problem effectively and plan the programs accordingly. It also provides us a data about childless couples and further help the Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) to plan various programmes and welfare services for childless couples.

Objectives of the Study: The study was carried out with the following objectives.

- To study marital adjustment of childless couples.
- To study the relationship between marital adjustment and marital duration of childless couples.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to gain the better insight into the experiences related to childlessness, the present study was designed and conducted to examine the impact of childlessness on marital

adjustment. Sample of the study consisted of 30 childless women belonging to urban areas of Jammu city. To maintain the homogeneity of sample the following factors were controlled while sample selection: only those childless women were included who have marital duration of atleast 10 years. Snowball sampling technique was used for selection of sample since the universe is limited and it is difficult to locate childless women. Interview guide and marital adjustment questionnaire (MAQ) were used to elicit responses of the respondents. Marital adjustment questionnaire was devised (Kumar and Rohatgi 1976) to study the marital adjustment. The MAQ in its final form consists of 25 highly discriminating 'Yes-No' type items. The area wise distribution of items is given in following table:

S.No.	Area	Item nos.	Total
1	Sexual	9,20,23,25	4
2	Social	3,4,5,6,12,14,15,18,19	9
3	Emotional	1,2,7,8,10,11,13,16,17,21,22,24	12

RESULTS

Background Information of Childless Couples

It was found that mean age of the sample group is 36 years and it was also found that 50% i.e. half of the respondents were from joint families and 50% of the respondents were from nuclear families. Out of the total respondents 40% were graduates, 27% were matric, 13% were illiterate and 10% were postgraduates. Regarding job status it was found that out of the total respondents (70%) were non-working, 27% of the respondents were involved in Government jobs and 3% were involved in private jobs. The mean marital duration of the respondents was 16 years. It was found that out of the total respondents 77% of the couples were primary infertile, 10% of the respondents had repeatedly miscarriages and 13% of the respondents were secondary infertile and all were reported the death of child due to accidents and illnesses. Before the diagnosis of the childlessness out of 70% non working respondents 24% of the respondents were involved in jobs like teaching in private schools, giving home tuitions, involved in private companies but after the diagnosis of the problem almost all of them suffered from psychological and physical

problems and had to face the cruelties of life and hear taunts from friends and relatives thus they use to avoid going out and stay in their homes and become very weak and introverted due to childlessness.

Marital Adjustments of the Respondents

It was also evident that before diagnosis of the problem 80% of the respondents had positive attitude towards their wives, they used to go out together, they enjoy almost every moment with each other and never dreamed of a life without their partner. Respondents told that their husbands had positive attitude towards them, i.e. they love and care for their feelings. Only 7% of the respondents revealed that their husbands had negative attitude towards them because their marriage was solemnized without each other's consent and marriage in real words is a burden and social binding which was imposed upon them. One of the respondent stated *"Ours was arrange marriage but my husband was involved in a very strong love affair with other woman. But due to the pressure from my in-laws side, my husband agreed to marry me but we never had intercourse for about 3 years. After that when every body was worried and enquired about my pregnancy, I talked to my husband and we had intercourse but after a very long time, I consulted a doctor and he diagnosed me as infertile and then taking infertility as a base, my husband filed a case of divorce against me."* But after diagnosis of the problem, it was found that 60% of the husbands had positive attitude towards respondents, that was due to mutual understanding and confidence in each other but about 20% of the respondents said that their husbands had changed their attitude from positive to negative and became so frustrated that they start blaming each other for childlessness. All the respondents

Table 1: Marital adjustment of the respondents

Categories of marital adjustment	Frequency	Percentage
Very good	5	17
Good	3	10
Average	7	23
Poor	8	27
Very poor	7	23
Total	30	100

faced personal problems due to childlessness. This included shortage of time spent with each other, lack of intimacy, not to spent recreational hours with each other and also not felt comfortable when sat along with all the family members together.

After applying Marital Adjustment Questionnaire, table 1 clearly reveals that 23% of the respondents had very poor marital adjustment due to childlessness, 20% of the respondents had poor marital adjustment, 23% of the respondents had average marital adjustment but when they were investigated qualitatively, it was revealed that, it was mainly as they wanted to avoid clashes between them because their goal was to keep peace at all costs, 10% of the respondents had good and 17% of the respondents had very good marital adjustment between them.

Marital Adjustment of the Respondents with Respect to Marital Duration

It is evident from the table 2 that those who had marital duration of 10 – 14 years, out of 17 (57%) respondents 12% fall in very good, 12% fall in good, 29% fall in average, 29% fall in poor, 18% fall in very poor. Those who had marital duration of 15 – 19 years, out of (20%) 6 respondents 33% fall in very good, 33% poor, 33% fall in very poor. From those who had marital duration of 20 – 24 years out of 3 (10%)

Table 2: Relationship between marital adjustment and marital duration

Marital duration	Marital adjustment										f	%
	Very good		Good		Aver		Poor		Very poor			
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
10-14	2	12	2	12	5	29	5	29	3	18	17	57
15-19	2	33	-	-	-	-	2	33	2	33	6	20
20-24	-	-	1	33	-	-	-	-	2	77	3	10
25-29	1	25	-	-	2	50	1	25	-	-	4	13
Total	5		3		7		8		7		30	100

respondents, 33% fall in good, 77% fall in very poor. Those who had marital duration of 25 – 29 years, out of 4 (20%) respondents 25% fall in very good, 50% fall in average, 25% fall in poor. Table 2 clearly depicts that with the increase in marital duration there is increase in marital adjustment

that there was positive but very little correlation between marital adjustment and marital duration of the respondents. It was also found that with the increase in marital duration there was increase in marital adjustment. In short we can conclude that marital adjustment of the childless couples was definitely affected due to childlessness.

CONCLUSION

From the results it was found childlessness had great effect on the marital adjustment of the respondents at different levels i.e. positive and negative. By the scores obtained from Marital Adjustment, most of them fall in average regarding their marital adjustment. These results were consistent with the study conducted by (Mann 1996) who reported that there were chances of divorce or remarriage on the part of the husband if the women had no children. The finding was also in tune with the findings of Sharma (1991) who reported that childless couples fall in average regarding happiness and satisfaction and they also face depression due to environmental factors. The findings were also supported by Solanki (1997) who reported that the marital adjustment was very low of childless couples as compared to women who were fertile. It was also was found

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