

## Marital Adjustment: A Predictor of Better Maternal Relationship

Deepika Vig and I. J. S. Jaswal

*Department of Human Development, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana 141 004,  
Punjab, India  
E-mail: vigdeepika@pau.edu*

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**ABSTRACT** Marital harmony is an important dimension of parent-child relationship. Present study was an attempt to understand the role of marital harmony in determining quality of mother-teen relationships. The total sample comprised of 300 respondents (100 each of mothers, sons and daughters) selected purposively from four zones of Ludhiana city. A self designed socio-demographic questionnaire was used to identify mothers that fulfilled the inclusion criteria set for the present study. The quality of mother-teen relationship as perceived by mothers was assessed. Marital adjustment of the mothers was also investigated to study its impact on mother-teen relationship. The results of the study revealed that majority of mothers had good marital relationships. Mothers having good marital relations had less conflicts and more realistic expectations from their sons and daughters. Mothers with average marital adjustment were significantly over protective for their daughters than the mothers with good or poor marital adjustment. With increase in marital adjustment mothers became more accepting and realistic in their expectations. Mothers' protecting and loving attitude for daughters increased significantly with increase in marital adjustment. The marital adjustment of the mothers contributed significantly to the daughter-mother relationship.

### INTRODUCTION

A common assumption is that marital relationship between the spouses and parent-child relationship are closely interconnected. Marital adjustment refers to a state of accommodation which is achieved in different areas where conflict may exist. Research supports the idea that good marital relations are associated with good parent-child relationship while difficulties in parent-child relationship are more common in families with poor marriages (Dasgupta and Basu 2002). Discord between parents appears to have a pervasive effect on pre and early adolescents in terms of their personal sense of well-being (Bishop and Ingersoll 1989). The handicap and distress associated with an unhappy marriage results in worse relationship that exists between parents and children (Khokhar and Agarwal 1999). Marital conflict and divorce affects children psychologically by creating serious instability and insecurity in the family. This immense disruption in the home life can create a situation that serves as a dysfunctional learning experience in all aspects of a child's life,

especially in the area of interpersonal functioning. Research has shown that teens who have positive relationships with their parents are less likely to engage in various risk behaviours including smoking, fighting and drinking (Resnick 2004; Guilamo-Ramos 2005).

Parental psychological well-being has also received increasing attention as a family process using marital adjustment and child development. Parental depression symptoms have received particular attention for their relation to marital relationships and child adjustment. In terms of child and family development, children of depressed parents are likely to have diagnosable disorders, especially depression, and to have more behavioral, emotional difficulties and problems at school than children of non-depressed parents. Youths from homes with marital violence consistently exhibit more psychopathology and more problems than youths not exposed to such hostility (Holden and Ritchie 1991). Vig and Saini (2011) reported that close parent-teen relationships, good parenting skills and secure bonds between parents and their adolescent children allow young people the freedom to grow and explore as children believe that their home represents a safe haven to which they can return when necessary.

Shaw and Emery (1987) reported that children from families with both maternal depression and inter-parental conflict evidenced higher internalizing and externalizing adjustment problems than their counterparts from families with

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*Address for correspondence:*

Dr (Mrs.) Deepika Vig  
Associate Professor  
Department of Human Development,  
College of Home Science,  
Punjab Agricultural University,  
Ludhiana 141004,  
Punjab, India  
E-mail: vigdeepika@pau.edu

neither or one of the family stressors. The findings indicate that marital problems and parental psychological adjustment consistently predict child problems and may somehow have joint effects on their relationship. Belsky (1984), and Easterbrooks and Emde (1988) suggested that mothers who have satisfying, supportive marital relationship with their husbands are more available, sensitive and responsive to the needs of their children. Thus, in the present study marital adjustment has been considered as an important factor that affects the relationship between the mother and the adolescent child.

### Objectives

The present study was planned with the following objectives:

1. to study the status of marital adjustment among selected mothers.
2. to find out whether the mother-child relationship differs in terms of mothers' marital adjustment.
3. to ascertain the contribution of marital adjustment in determining the quality of mother-child relationship across two sexes.

### METHODOLOGY

**i) Selection of Sample:** Families for the present study were purposively selected from four zones of Ludhiana city. These families were nuclear families from middle and upper- middle class where mothers were at least graduates and were working and had one teenage son and teenage daughter between 13-19 years of age. The target sample in each family was mother, son and daughter. Thus, the present study was based upon a total sample size of 300 respondents (100 each of mothers, sons and daughters).

**ii) Research Instruments:** The following tools were used for various assessments of the selected families.

1. *Socio-demographic Questionnaire:* A self-designed socio-demographic questionnaire was used to identify mothers that fulfilled the inclusion criteria set for the present study.
2. *Socio-economic Status Scale (Bhardwaj 2001):* This scale was used to identify mothers belonging to middle and upper-middle socio-economic status.
3. *Parent Child Relationship Scale (Sharma and Chauhan 2002):* This scale was used

to study mother- child relationship as perceived by mothers on eight dichotomous dimensions of parenting. After separating the dichotomous ends of all dimensions, parent-child relationship was categorized as Good, Average and Poor.

4. *Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (Kumar and Rohtagi 1999)* is a standardized tool that was used as a quantitative measure for assessing marital adjustment of the mothers.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 displays percent distribution of mothers across various levels of marital adjustment. It was found that majority of mothers (57%) reported their marital relationship as good. Average marital relationship was reported by 30 percent of mothers whereas, only 13 percent of mothers reported their relationship as poor. It may be concluded that majority of mothers had mutual understanding and affectionate marital relationship and they had few or no complaints about their marital relationship.

**Table 1: Percent distribution of mothers across various levels of marital adjustment**

| S. No. | Levels of marital adjustment | Mother |       |       |       |
|--------|------------------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
|        |                              | f      | %     | Mean  | SD    |
| 1.     | Good                         | 57     | 57.00 | 22.53 | 1.24  |
| 2.     | Average                      | 30     | 30.00 | 19.43 | 0.730 |
| 3.     | Poor                         | 13     | 13.00 | 14.08 | 4.11  |

Table 2 projects mothers' perception of their relationship with sons and daughters across three levels of marital adjustment. It is evident from the table that mothers with good marital adjustment had significantly ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) better relationship with their spouse (8.14) and had realistic role expectations (8.86) from their sons and daughters as compared to their counterparts. Realistic role expectations indicates emotional stability, consistency in thought and action of the mothers and ability to present themselves as sufficiently effective and inspiring model for their children to follow. It was also observed that mothers with average marital adjustment (8.07) were found significantly ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) over protective for their daughters as compared to the mothers with good (7.30) or poor (6.69) marital adjustment. Over-protective behaviour

| S. No. | Dimensions of PCR          | Mothers' perception for sons |      |  |                           |      |  | Mothers' perception for daughters |      |  |               |    |      |                        |    |      |                           |    |      |                        |    |               |         |    |  |
|--------|----------------------------|------------------------------|------|--|---------------------------|------|--|-----------------------------------|------|--|---------------|----|------|------------------------|----|------|---------------------------|----|------|------------------------|----|---------------|---------|----|--|
|        |                            | Poor adjustment (n=13)       |      |  | Average adjustment (n=30) |      |  | Good adjustment (n=57)            |      |  | F-value       |    |      | Poor adjustment (n=13) |    |      | Average adjustment (n=30) |    |      | Good adjustment (n=57) |    |               | F-value |    |  |
|        |                            | Mean                         | SD   |  | Mean                      | SD   |  | Mean                              | SD   |  | Mean          | SD |      | Mean                   | SD |      | Mean                      | SD |      | Mean                   | SD |               | Mean    | SD |  |
| 1      | Acceptance                 | 7.31                         | 1.38 |  | 8.03                      | 1.50 |  | 8.16                              | 1.78 |  | 1.400         |    | 7.31 | 1.25                   |    | 8.13 | 1.38                      |    | 8.26 | 1.78                   |    | 1.870         |         |    |  |
| 2      | Over protection            | 6.69                         | 1.60 |  | 7.87                      | 1.59 |  | 7.12                              | 1.73 |  | 2.890         |    | 6.69 | 1.60                   |    | 8.07 | 1.66                      |    | 7.30 | 1.75                   |    | <b>3.460*</b> |         |    |  |
| 3      | Over-indulgence            | 7.00                         | 1.68 |  | 6.47                      | 1.76 |  | 6.40                              | 1.68 |  | 0.660         |    | 7.00 | 1.68                   |    | 6.53 | 1.80                      |    | 6.47 | 1.64                   |    | 0.520         |         |    |  |
| 4      | Utopian-expectation        | 7.23                         | 1.48 |  | 7.10                      | 1.35 |  | 7.28                              | 1.63 |  | 0.400         |    | 7.23 | 1.48                   |    | 7.43 | 1.55                      |    | 7.46 | 1.65                   |    | 0.110         |         |    |  |
| 5      | Severe moralism            | 6.46                         | 1.51 |  | 6.63                      | 1.59 |  | 7.04                              | 1.56 |  | 1.090         |    | 6.69 | 1.44                   |    | 6.43 | 1.63                      |    | 7.18 | 1.62                   |    | 2.230         |         |    |  |
| 6      | Severe discipline          | 6.54                         | 1.56 |  | 6.63                      | 1.90 |  | 6.32                              | 1.55 |  | 0.380         |    | 6.85 | 1.63                   |    | 6.63 | 1.88                      |    | 6.60 | 1.74                   |    | 0.110         |         |    |  |
| 7      | Marital adjustment         | 6.54                         | 1.51 |  | 7.17                      | 1.64 |  | 8.14                              | 1.25 |  | <b>9.270*</b> |    | 6.38 | 1.45                   |    | 7.13 | 1.63                      |    | 8.12 | 1.32                   |    | <b>9.900*</b> |         |    |  |
| 8      | Realistic role expectation | 7.46                         | 1.33 |  | 7.80                      | 1.75 |  | 8.86                              | 1.06 |  | <b>9.570*</b> |    | 7.46 | 1.51                   |    | 7.87 | 1.63                      |    | 8.84 | 1.16                   |    | <b>8.350*</b> |         |    |  |

of the mothers signifies uncared pampering, indulgence, excessive physical contact, prevention of independence, over solicitude, and shielding behaviour towards their daughters. These results are in line with that of Belsky (1984), and Easterbrooks and Emde (1988) who suggested that mothers who have satisfying, supportive marital relationship with their husbands are more available, sensitive and responsive to the needs of their children.

Table 3 indicates the correlation of marital adjustment with mothers' perception of parent-child relationship with their sons and daughters. Significant positive ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) relationship of marital adjustment with acceptance (0.199\* and 0.208\* for sons and daughters respectively) and realistic role expectations (0.386\* and 0.365\* for sons and daughters respectively) indicate that better marital relationships enhanced the accepting behaviour of mothers and made them more realistic about their expectations from their sons as well as daughters. Good marital adjustment reduced their tendency to have imaginary and faulty role expectations from their teenage children. Marital adjustment of mothers have shown strongest relationship with marital cohesion with highest correlation value of  $r = 0.415^*$  and  $.434^*$  for sons and daughters respectively. This indicates that better the marital relationship of mothers more congenial home environment they provided to their children and more they perceived themselves to be effective and inspiring model to follow. It indicates that better the adjustment of the mothers, less conflicts they had with their partners and less they demonstrated examples of damaged temperament.

| S. No. | Dimensions of PCR          | Marital adjustment (r) |           |
|--------|----------------------------|------------------------|-----------|
|        |                            | Sons                   | Daughters |
| 1.     | Acceptance                 | 0.199*                 | 0.208*    |
| 2.     | Over protection            | 0.034                  | 0.063     |
| 3.     | Over-indulgence            | -0.125                 | -0.117    |
| 4.     | Utopian-expectation        | 0.016                  | 0.013     |
| 5.     | Severe moralism            | 0.162                  | 0.167     |
| 6.     | Severe discipline          | 0.033                  | 0.069     |
| 7.     | Marital cohesion           | 0.415*                 | 0.434*    |
| 8.     | Realistic role expectation | 0.386*                 | 0.365*    |

Table 4 depicts the regression analysis of mother-teen relationship as perceived by mothers for their sons and daughters. To ascertain

**Table 4: Regression analysis of PCR as perceived by mothers for their sons and daughters**

| S. No. | Parent-child relationship | Regression coefficient 'β' | Standard error of 'β' | 't' value           | R <sup>2</sup> -values |
|--------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1.     | Mother-Daughter           | 0.071                      | 0.033                 | 2.195*              | 0.069                  |
| 2.     | Mother-Son                | 0.047                      | 0.032                 | 1.495 <sup>NS</sup> | 0.037                  |

NS = non significant (p≤0.05)

\* Significant (p≤0.05)

the contribution of marital adjustment in determining the quality of mother-child relationship across two sexes, regression analysis was done. The regression coefficient value of 0.071 and 0.047 respectively for mother-daughter and mother-son relationship indicated positive contribution of marital harmony in maintaining mother-teen relationships. The significant 't-value' of 2.195 indicated that marital adjustment of the mothers significantly improved the quality of mother-daughter relationship. This highlights the fact that better marital relations the mothers had, more close and positive relationship they had with their daughters. Therefore, it could be concluded that good marital relations improved the quality of mother-daughter relationship significantly.

### CONCLUSION

The results of the study revealed that majority of mothers had good marital relationship. Mothers having good marital relations had less conflicts and more realistic expectations from their sons and daughters. Mothers with average marital adjustment were significantly over protective for their daughters than the mothers with good or poor marital adjustment. Mothers' protecting and loving attitude for daughters in-

creased significantly with increase in marital adjustment. The marital adjustment of the mothers contributed significantly to improve daughter-mother relationship.

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