

PSYCHOSOCIAL MANIFESTATIONS OF PERCEIVED SUBMISSIVENESS IN NEWLY MARRIED WOMEN

Amna Bibi¹, Nimra Munawar^{*2}

¹Student, Lahore School of Behavioural Science (LSBS), The University of Lahore

^{*2}Lecturer, Lahore School of Behavioural Science (LSBS), The University of Lahore

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20373386>

Keywords

Submissiveness, Gender Role Socialization, Psychosocial Well-being, newly married woman

Article History

Received: 25 March 2026

Accepted: 05 April 2026

Published: 25 May 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Nimra Munawar

nimra.munawar@lsbs.uol.edu.pk

Abstract

Marriage in patriarchal societies often demands conformity to rigid gender roles, where newly married women are expected to prioritize submissiveness and familial harmony, leading to internalized submissiveness that affects emotional well-being. The study aimed to explore how cultural norms, early gender role socialization, and marital dynamics shape submissive behaviors and their psychosocial consequences in newly married women. Using a phenomenological research design with thematic analysis, data were collected through semi-structured interviews to capture narratives in depth. Thematic analysis revealed six dominant themes: gender expectations, inequality consequences, social norms, emotional consequences, psychological consequences, and relationship dynamic. Results showed that submissiveness was not usually voluntary but shaped by gender conditioning and patriarchal customs. Women reported emotional suppression, loss of autonomy, diminished self-worth, and heightened risk to psychosocial issues. However, participants also demonstrated awareness of healthier relationship patterns, emphasizing mutual respect, balanced decision-making, and emotional safety. The findings highlight the urgent need for culturally sensitive interventions that challenge rigid gender roles and promote emotional empowerment in newly married women. Mental health practitioners can integrate counseling programs addressing self-silence and identity suppression, while community awareness campaigns may help deconstruct cultural narratives that equate submissiveness with virtue. The implication of the study is to challenge patriarchal conditioning as a means of reducing gender inequality and fostering women's long-term psychosocial well-being.

Introduction

Marriage is one of the significant psychosocial transitions of women and especially of those that live in a patriarchal society where gender roles are deeply ingrained. Marriage in the context of Pakistan and South Asia in general is not merely a union between two people but a social institution, which adheres strictly to the cultural rules that impose homeliness over an

individualistic life. New brides are usually supposed to adjust fast to the home of their husband, match with demands of obedience, modesty and self-sacrifice and repress individual needs to keep the marriage intact. These anticipations often cause the internalization of subordinate positions, which define the identity of women and interpersonal roles. The studies have shown that this culturally enforced

submissiveness may have some negative influence on emotional well-being, self-concept, and even relational health, particularly in the initial years of marriage (Gilbert, 2000; Mumtaz and Salway, 2009).

Perceived submissiveness refers to a predisposition to obey the authority or other persons, and it is usually low levels of dominance, conflict aversion, and oral or bodily deference (Kiesler, 1983). Although being submissive can be a temporary measure to preserve peace, chronic submissiveness is linked to psychological distress, such as anxiety, depression, and identity confusion (Johnson et al., 2012). Vulnerability is aggravated by pressure to achieve social and family norms in newly married women, especially when there are few support systems. South Asian studies have shown empirically that those women who have been socialized to be submissive before marriage report greater distress than those who have a more egalitarian marriage relationship (Ali et al., 2011; Khan et al., 2023).

Much of cultural socialization is central in developing submissive behavior more so in collectivist societies where the concept of femininity is synonymous with endurance, obedience and emotional restraint. Since their childhood, women may be conditioned to choose the loyalty and accordance to their family over their expression, and submissiveness as a good moral value is enforced (Hareli et al., 2009). In Pakistan, ideas like *izzat* (family honor) contribute even more to the demand towards obedience to husbands and elders that is often explained by patriarchal research of religious values (Babul et al., 2019). These norms are absorbed as time goes by restricting the role of women in making decisions and creating gender inequalities in marriage and society.

The long-term psychosocial effects of long-term submissiveness are enormous and complex. Research always associates submissive behavior with depression, emotional dependency, self-silencing, and low self-esteem (Karakurt & Silver, 2013; Lampis et al., 2018). According to longitudinal studies, the submissive patterns may be persistent despite the depressive symptom's

remission, and they are a risk factor of a relapse (Gillard et al., 2021; Wetherall et al., 2019). Moreover, economic reliance worsens the vulnerability, as women with lack of financial independence are less capable to break norm restrictive practices and demand autonomy of the self, which contributes to the further suffering of emotions (Khan and Zaidi, 2020; Rajesh, 2022).

The cross-cultural evidence points out that the psychological effects of submissiveness are heavily mediated by gender norms in society. In societies with more gender equality (Sweden) higher female autonomy and shared marital roles show higher levels of marital satisfaction and reduced emotional strain (Andersson et al., 2023). On the contrary, Indian and Pakistani studies reveal that submissiveness in marriage is associated with the higher probability of depressive and suicidal thoughts (Gupta, 2023; Ali et al., 2011). Such results support the necessity to deal with the submissiveness phenomenon in the framework of its sociocultural aspect and underline the necessity of the interventions oriented to the empowerment of women in terms of their autonomy, assertiveness, and psychosocial stability with the help of education, economic empowerment, and supportive policy systems.

Submissive behavior in newly married women can be understood as a learned response shaped through observation, imitation, and social reinforcement within family and cultural contexts (Bandura, 1977). Cultural gender norms further define obedience, emotional restraint, and nurturance as ideal feminine traits, encouraging women to suppress personal needs to preserve marital harmony (Eagly et al., 2012). Over time, such internalization restricts autonomy, undermines perceptions of competence, and weakens emotional reciprocity within marriage. When women are unable to act in line with their own values or exercise meaningful choice, psychological strain emerges in the form of anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced self-worth. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives position submissiveness as a socially conditioned pattern with significant psychosocial

consequences rather than an inherent personal attribute (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The behavior of “obedience, modesty, sacrifice and silence” is consistently linked to submissiveness among the newly married women and it forms part of their cultural, familial and religious upbringing. In many patriarchal societies, especially in South Asian culture, women are socialised to put the needs of their husbands and families first and to sacrifice their own needs and desires to be “good wives” (Saeed & Malik, 2022; Yasmin et al., 2022). Such beliefs are passed down through the family, inter-generational learning, media and community acceptance which put pressure on girls to conform to the traditional gender roles. While submissive behavior might be socially acceptable and encouraged, earlier research indicates that it can have a negative impact on psychological wellness of women as it leads to lesser marital satisfaction, stress, anxiety, emotional suppression and loss of identity (Ahmed & Iqbal, 2019; Naeem et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2010; Çelik et al., 2015). It has also been correlated with maladaptive thinking patterns, emotional reliance and lower coping skills, suggesting that it is not solely a cultural norm but also a psychosocial risk factor (Akyunus & Guler, 2023; Patel & Cogle, 2023).

There are several psychological and sociological theories that can explain why newly married women are submissive. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory proposes that women adopt passive and obedient behavior through observation and social reinforcement (Bandura, 1977), and Gender Role Theory suggests that submissiveness is a desired feminine quality in society (Eagly et al., 2012). Self-Determination theory also suggests that when individuals are not given the freedom to make choices and are lacking in emotional needs, it can cause stress and result in mental health problems (Deci & Ryan, 2000). While the mental health and marital adjustment of women are discussed in many studies, in few studies' attention has been paid towards the internalized submissiveness that newly married women face in the early years of

marriage (Kumar et al., 2022; Dolan, 2020). Thus, this study seeks to reflect on women's perception of submissiveness and its psychological impacts, as well as the impact of the culture and family that still perpetuates it (Rahman, 2023; Sardenberg, 2016).

Method

Research design

The phenomenological research design was applied in the study to examine the lived experiences of newly married women especially regarding submissiveness through arranged marriages. The data was identified and analyzed using thematic Analysis to determine and identify patterns and themes of the personal and social experiences of the participants especially concerning complex or emotionally important issues (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The design was mostly aimed at gaining the perspective of the participants using own narratives. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect data since it offered the flexibility of opening to personal topics and allows consistency among the interviewees. The phenomenological approach helped the researcher reveal new trends of thinking, emotion, and behavior in early marital life.

Sample

This sample was taken out of eight women who are at least 18 years old and not older than 35 years of age, and they lived in the suburbs of Pakistan. The data on the participants were collected with the help of a volunteer sampling method, and the interviews were conducted until the stage of saturation. The selection of the participants was done following an evaluation of the inclusion and exclusion criteria where only those who fulfilled the criteria were included.

Data Collection Technique

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data because this qualitative approach is very appropriate when the researcher is interested in the subjective meaning and lived experiences as well as providing data with analytic consistency

(Creswell, 2013; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). This would allow the participants to explain their own understanding of submissiveness as a part of marriage relationships, and the interview guide allowed addressing the essential areas of research. Interviews were held in a confined and low noise environment to foster a sense of comfort, freedom, and confidentiality and each interview lasted about 2030 minutes depending on the level of interest of the interviewee. As required by the ethical research standards, prior informed consent was collected, and the participants gave permission to record audio recordings (American Psychological Association, 2017). Digital recordings of interviews were done to record verbal subtleties like tone, pauses, and emphasis that are important in the interpretive analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Transcription was done word-to-word to generate rich text data which underwent rigorous themed analysis to form the core of analysis.

Procedure

The relevant authorities were consulted and given permission to approach the volunteer participants after seeking the opinion of the institutional review board. Participants have been recruited through personal and community networks that were members of suburban areas of residents. Prior to the interviews, a written informed consent form was given to 49 participants of the study, which outlined the purpose, voluntary nature of the study, confidentiality and their right to withdraw as soon as they wish. The respondents who consented to take part signed the form and verbal

consent was further sought just before audio recording.

Results

The paper reviewed the psychological and social development phases of women in a matrimonial relationship and especially in areas of submissiveness, power imbalance in relationships and cultural and family pressures. The analysis of data was conducted with the help of thematic analysis which made it possible to identify common patterns and meanings of the narratives of the participants systematically. Eight married women who have passed the inclusion criteria were involved in the in-depth interviews after giving an informed consent in accordance with ethical research standards. It was analyzed to produce six core themes namely expectations by gender, social norms, emotional impact, psychological impact, consequences of inequality, and relationship dynamics. Results had shown that submissiveness was not a voluntary or conscious decision; instead, it developed due to internalized gender roles, social pressures and established cultural norms. Those involved cited emotional stress, loss of self-identity and increase of psychosocial distress especially in situations characterized by inequality in decision making and insufficient emotional support. Nonetheless, through such challenges, women described their explicit understanding of healthy relationship as involving respect of each other, sharing responsibilities and roles, emotional safety, and the communicative process, indicating the complicated interplay between the structural and individualistic aspects of life in marriages.

Figure 1
Hierarchy of identified major themes NVivo 15

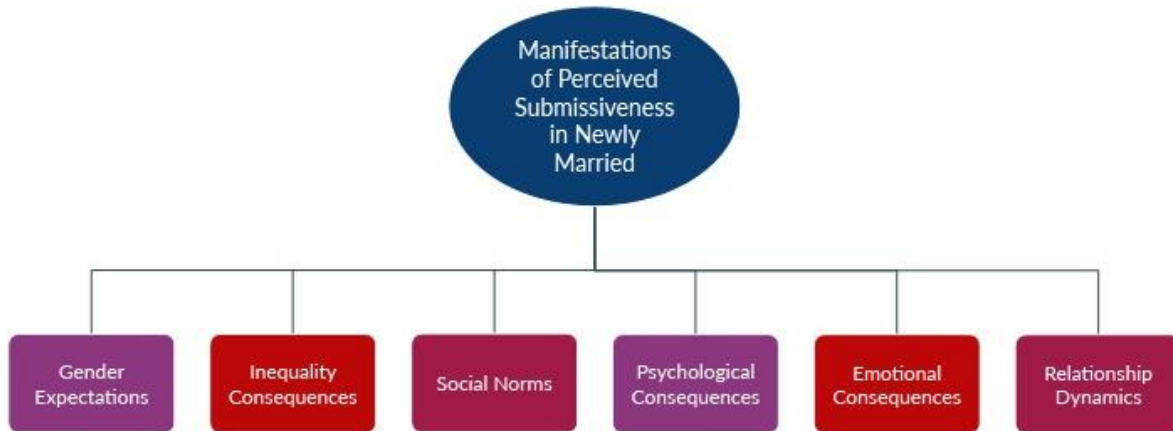


Table 4.1
Representation of codes, subthemes, and major themes

Major Theme	Subtheme	Codes
Gendered Expectations	Cultural & Traditional Conditioning	Internalized Patriarchy Socialized Submission Cultural Justification Inherited Gender Bias Male Superiority Norms Preconditioned Gender Submission Cultural Submission Gender Conformity Norms Gender Role Indoctrination Cultural Misuse of Religion Role Internalization Gender Norm Conditioning Prescribed Gender Behavior
	Role Expectations in Marriage	Submissiveness vs. Equality Conditional Compatibility Marital Power Asymmetry Compliance. Without Consent Affective Compliance Collaborative Compliance Mutual Understanding Reciprocity Expectation Emotional Cooperation Emotional Investment

		Voluntary Submission	Respect-Based
	Upbringing	Collaborative Marital Ethics	
		Patriarchal Modeling	
		Learned Helplessness	
		Learned Submission	
		Normalization of Emotional Repression	
		Assertive Communication through Upbringing	
		Endurance as Virtue	
		Guilt Conditioning	
		Intergenerational Learning	Respect
		Internalized Norms	Submissive
	Socialization	Assertive Role Learning	
		Duty to Preserve Marriage	
		Empowered Communication	
		Assertive Upbringing	
		Normalized Injustice	
		Female Agency Stigma	
		Cultural Silence	
		Emotional Inhibition	
	Advice to Future Brides	Economic & Emotional Autonomy	
		Assertive Adaptation	
		Balanced Self-Preservation	
Social Norms	Family Honor	Penalization of Female Assertiveness	
		Repressed Expression	
		Behavior Policing	
	Cultural Silence	Fear-Driven Virtue	
		Normalized Cultural Injustice	
		Normalizing Female Silence	
	Religion Conflict	Religious Illiteracy as Control	
		Religious Misinterpretation	
		Misuse Religious Narratives	
		Marriage Preservation as Religious Obligation	
	Joint Family Pressure	Familial Submission	
		Strategic Silence	
		Agency Loss	
Emotional Consequences	Mental Health Effects	Emotional Suppression	
		Invisible Emotional Sufferings	
		Psychosomatic Distress	



Emotional Disconnection



Inequality Consequences

Erosion of Voice and Autonomy

Mental Health Impact

Submissiveness as Survival

Codependent Fatigue
 Multidimensional
 Psychological Impact
 Emotional Exhaustion
 Psychological Strain
 Financial Stress
 Chronic Helplessness
 Mental Health Neglect
 Emotional Masking
 Collective Neglect
 Suppression to Sadness
 Emotional Repression
 Psychological Burnout
 Struggling to meet expectations
 Health Decline
 Unequal Partnership
 Detachment
 Withdrawal from Invalidation
 Emotional Paralysis
 Existential Disengagement
 Detachment from Power
 Imbalance
 Intimacy Erosion
 Emotional Distance
 Silent Suffering
 Concealed Coping
 Spiritual Coping
 Self-Silencing
 Conflict Avoidance
 Misinterpret Sacrifice
 Fear-Driven Compliance
 Moral Conformity
 Outsourced Coping
 Relational Sacrifice
 Self-Worth Suppression
 Progressive Erosion
 Identity Loss
 Emotional Disempowerment
 Psychological Invisibility
 Relational Breakdown
 Power-Based Worth Loss
 Habitual Suppression
 Power Shift
 Learned Helplessness
 Invisible Sacrifice
 Decision-Making

Psychological Consequences	Loss of Autonomy	Marginalization Suicidal Ideation Psychological Invisibility Self-Loss Social Withdrawal Gradual Identity Diffusion Autonomy Loss Worth Loss Self-Doubt Emotional Labor Chronic Compliance Loss Self-Worth Crisis Confidence Decline Incompetence Perception Confidence Erosion Efficacy Loss
	Loss of Confidence	Unilateral Decisions Exclusion Unidirectional Power Powerlessness Marital Imbalance Marginalized Decisions Submissiveness as Barrier One-Sided Compromise Inequality Idealized Symmetry Reciprocity Expectation Validation During Trauma Emotional Support Need Emotional Check-Ins Emotional Inclusion Safe Dynamics Verbal Respect Safety & Reciprocity Participatory Decision-Making Supportive Partnership Empathetic Listening Opinion Validation Respectful Interaction Communication Impact Mutual Respect Collaborative Structure Balanced Expression Growth-Oriented Ethic
Relationship Dynamics	Power Imbalance in Decisions	
	Lack of Partnership Equality	
	Emotional Needs	
	Communication	
	Ideal Partner Behavior	
	Conditional Submissiveness	Safety-Based Submissiveness Respect-Based Voluntarism Bounded Submissiveness



The results show that the experiences of submissiveness prescribed to women in marriage are culturally conditioned, nurtured, and gendered socialization that starts when the woman is still a child and continues to be used in the matrimonial roles. The respondents continuously explained how girls are inculcated to be obedient, silent and enduring as virtues and boys are socialized to be in charge which develops normal power imbalances which later develop into marital relations. The many instances of submissiveness were mainly seen as a forced expectation more than a free or respectful decision which, in most cases, created tension between the parties, a sense of identity repression and psychological turmoil in case they were one sided or forced. A large number of women could dispel cultural and religious wrongdoings that justify patriarchy and rather state that healthy relations must be founded on equal regard, mutual decision, and cooperative emotions. Musings on childhood showed that lessons on sacrifice and endurance at a young age created tolerance on accepting inequality and socialization on the need of silence. Based on their life experiences, the respondents suggested that future brides should focus on their own self-worth, emotional and financial independence, boundary-setting and assertive communication, and redefine submissiveness as a choice as opposed to a fear-inducing or coercive requirement.

Social Norms

The theme examines how women's submissiveness and limitation of independence are shaped by societal expectations, specifically those related to religion, family honor, silence, and joint family dynamics. The social norms are the influential factors convincing women to accept the role that is defined in marriage by decreasing autonomy and enforcing submission in the following essential ways: religion, family honor, silence and more influencing factors such as collective actions within common families. Women are conditioned to perceive the behavior of compliance as the manifestation of virtue and

reverence toward family traditions and the behavior of resistance as a disgrace or defiance. Consequently, conformity is a survival instinct and as such, the burden of ensuring harmony is left to women at the expense of self-rule.

The results show that the forces of family reputation, cultural silence, religious misunderstanding and family pressure work in conjunction to cause the submissiveness of women, which restricts the expression of emotions and the autonomy of an individual. Subjects explained the way the concept of family honor forces women to be silent and obedient even in situations that harm their emotions because assertiveness is usually associated with the feeling of shame or disobedience. Cultural norms also make silence an expected action of patience and virtue to make the emotional suppression of emotions an overall survival mechanism, and not a moral decision. Numerous women also made the difference between valid religious doctrines and cultural beliefs, which they observed that the selective and subverted interpretations of religion are often applied to justify male custody and sort of force. Residing in joint family arrangements only exacerbated these demands and women were under the watchful eye all the time expected to comply not only to husbands but also to in laws. The combination of these dynamics contributes to emotional burnout, guilt, the lack of identity, and mental trauma, exposing the manner in which submission is ensured by fearing being judged, instead of respecting one another or being committed to it willingly.

Emotional Consequences

The theme explores the deep psychological and emotional effects of prolonged obedience, suppression, and imbalance in relationships including mental health deterioration and emotional coping mechanisms. The need to constantly obey and suppress feelings have dire emotional consequences, and commonly lead to a struggle internally, a sense of frustration and worsening mental health. Women describe that they feel lonely, stressed and lack self-worth

because they keep giving the others first priority by neglecting their needs. The psychological defense subcabinets like silence, endurance, or withdrawal become the survival techniques, but also they will contribute to the self-perpetuation of suppression, as well, which diminishes the resistance and overall well-being of women.

The results depict that years of submissiveness in marriage have significant mental health effects, which are usually demonstrated by emotional repression, psychological depression, and a slow process of emotional withdrawal. Respondents reported experiencing a sense of being unheard, overwhelmed, and internally burdened with the silence that was associated with culture turning into the foundation of chronic anxiety, low mood, and helplessness. With the course of time, emotional strain remained unresolved which was revealed in physical symptoms in insomnia, fatigue and appetite disorders which further weakened psychological resilience. It showed that emotional detachment turned out to be one of the key experiences as the one-sided submission substituted intimacy with duty, and women experienced isolation in the face of constant relation presence. In turn, the participants turned towards such coping mechanisms as silence, prayer, and sharing with close family members, which alleviated the symptoms temporarily, but did not solve the deeper relational imbalances. These trends underscore the role of unreciprocated submission and neglect in escalating mental health vulnerability over the long term in the absence of supportive communications and validation.

Inequality Consequences

The theme captures the long-term effects of rooted gender imbalances within marital relationships, as reported by participants. The consequences extend beyond interpersonal dynamics to impact women's self-concept, emotional resilience, and mental health. The disparity in marital relations has long-term implications that are not manifested only in the dynamics between people, but also in the self-concept of women and their lifepaths.

Continuous inferiority reduces self-esteem, deprives oneself of chances to expand on a personal level and destroys emotional stability. With time, this deep-rooted discrepancy throws into regularity generational schemas of disparity as women are not merely unable to improve independence but also pressured with the duty of propagating corresponding principles to their children and as a result, feeding gendered vulnerability cycles.

The results of this research suggest that the issue of marital inequality can result in a gradual loss of voice and autonomy in women, which restricts the possibility to express personal opinion and make independent decisions in addition to preserving a sense of personal agency. The respondents narrated how recurrent rejection of their views contributed to low self-esteem, lack of identity and a sense of invisibility to the relationship psychologically. The continual requirement to shut down individual cravings was very much associated with decreasing self-worth, and emotional fatigue and feeling of helplessness. As it turned out, submissiveness was not the choice of many women but a survival tactic to escape conflicts and maintain the marriage stability. Nonetheless, such a response to the crisis, as an adaptive measure, frequently transforms into a learned helplessness and non-participation in the decision-making process. In the long run, these trends established inequality, supporting marginalization and increasing the emotional distress in the long term

Psychological Consequences

The theme explores the lasting inner consequences of sustained compliance, pressure, and imbalance, especially in terms of identity, autonomy, and mental health resilience. The mental cost of extended learning and repression is reflected in identity, independence and strength imbalance. Women usually struggle with a lack of identity since they are torn between conformity and self-wants. The dissonance instills a sense of helplessness, internalized guilt, and a decrease of self-efficacy and leaves women susceptible to various mental health issues in the

long-term (depression, anxiety, and lack of coping ability).

The results indicate that long-term submissiveness in the unequal marital roles results in a great loss of control and identity among women. The participants reported that they were emotionally frozen, not knowing who they were beyond those of a spouse, and more and more detached to their own needs and preferences. Gradually, the anticipation of total compliance undermined self-esteem, decision-making ability, as well as created profound psychological exhaustion. A lot of women represented themselves as passive spectators in their own lives as the ones who could not make even small decisions with a sense of certainty. It was a long-term oppressive silence and agency that not only undermined the inner drive but also exacerbated emotional fatigue and invisibility. In the most drastic cases, lack of autonomy and validation were contributors of existential distress, of which self-harm thoughts ensured, highlighting the drastic psychological outcomes of constant relational inequality.

Relationship Dynamics

The theme examines how unequal emotional and decision-making dynamics in marriage manifest in the form of separation, conflicts, and a lack of partnership. Such unfair relations are reflected in decision-making, conflict resolution, and emotional work in marriage. Women are often expected to bear tensions, make more tradeoffs and never confront authority whilst men remain in power of decisions and control. Such dynamics are conducive to conflicts, distance and lack of real partnership, with relations become characterized by dominance instead of a sense of mutual respect, trust or collective accountability. Its results show that the marriage relationships characterized by the lack of equal power tend to erode the agency of women, their emotional safety, and their feeling of partnership. Respondents spoke of the sense of meaninglessness and self-distrust and emotional numbness caused by being excluded in decision-making, how this slowly turned marriage into an

obligation-focused arrangement. Nobody being equal and treating each other with respect resulted in many women being regarded as passive figures and never as active subjects and emotional needs were never taken into account. Communication skills and emotional sensitivity were found to be the key elements of relationship well-being as the feeling of being listened to and being right led to women feeling appreciated and safe. The subject matter was compared by the participants to their vision of a perfect match a partner who can be likened to empathy, shared responsibility, and emotional intelligence instead of being dominant. Significantly, women redefined submissiveness as acceptable, but only when it is voluntary, respectful, and mutual and that no form of adaptation must be achieved at the expense of loss of dignity, identity or self-respect.

Discussion

The current paper offers a subtle interpretation of the role of perceived submissiveness in influencing the psychosocial life of new married women in Pakistan, especially in patriarchal and collectivistic settings. The results reveal that submissiveness is mostly internalized by the acquiring of early gender socialization where silence, endurance and obedience are created as virtues of femininity and further enforced as morality and family duty in marital life. The process itself indicates the process of patriarchal conditioning which starts when women are young and gets ingrained in their identities with time (Anderson et al., 2013). The stories of the participants also resonate with cross-cultural results according to which the discourse of culture normalizes the idea of female silence and tolerance as the indicators of respectability (Finn and Laaboudi, 2024). Simultaneously, women were becoming more critically attentive and oppositional, which was attuned to feminist views of consciousness-raising as a means of empowering and becoming an agent (Begum, 2016).

Marital inequality especially in decision making and emotional reciprocity proved to be a major

cause of psychological agony. The participants often explained how they were not included in key decisions of their life, and it created a sense of helplessness, resentment, and emotional detachment, making marriage a responsibility-related process, instead of a relationship. These results are in line with the studies that indicate that an unequal set of power decreases marital satisfaction and well-being (Farrell et al., 2015). The joint family set up and economic reliance were additional cultural influences that heightened marginalization of women, which endorsed silence as a survival mechanism as witnessed elsewhere in South Asia (Rahman et al., 2024). This kind of evidence indicates that inequality in marriage is not just a matter that exists between individuals but a structural phenomenon which is perpetuated by cultural and institutional conventions.

The paper also identifies a high level of mental health damage in the form of anxiety, depression, the inability to cope with stress and emotional numbness, and identity adverse effects of long-term submissiveness. The invisibility and emotional numbness experienced by participants resonate with the literature that connects the submissive behavior to the psychosomatic suffering and emotional exhaustion (Yilmaz and Sardogan, 2015). Existential distress and suicidal thoughts were linked to suppressed agency and long-term invalidation in severe instances, which supports the research results that loss of autonomy is a severe psychological risk factor (Ahmed and Iqbal, 2019; Sultana, 2012). Though, certain women turned the role of submissiveness into a tolerable behavior, when it was made out of personal choice and because of mutual respect, culturally enforced obedience was always labeled as destructive. These results highlight the importance of culturally competent mental healthcare strategies and marital counseling models that facilitate affective reciprocity, dialogue, and equity, instead of stammering and silence.

Implications and Limitations

The findings of this study carry important implications for understanding marital inequality as a structural, cultural, and psychological phenomenon rather than an individual shortcoming. Submissiveness emerged as a socially constructed behavior shaped by intergenerational norms, cultural expectations, and selective religious interpretations, highlighting the need to address inequality at systemic levels. These results suggest that interventions in Pakistan must extend beyond economic empowerment to include culturally sensitive marital counseling, psychosocial support, and identity-strengthening initiatives that address emotional well-being and self-worth. Despite the study's qualitative nature, reliance on self-reported data, and focus on women within a single cultural context, the insights provide a strong foundation for future research. Subsequent studies should adopt mixed-method and longitudinal designs, incorporate both partners' perspectives, and examine how marital roles evolve over time. At a broader level, policy and community-based efforts involving educators, religious leaders, and civil society organizations are essential to reshape dominant narratives of obedience and honor into models grounded in mutual respect, dialogue, and relational equality.

Suggestion

Future research should adopt mixed-method designs that integrate quantitative indicators of psychosocial well-being with in-depth qualitative accounts, while incorporating perspectives of both women and men to capture relational power dynamics comprehensively. Longitudinal studies are recommended to examine how gender roles and expectations evolve across different stages of marriage. At the policy level, culturally responsive marital counseling, community-based rights awareness initiatives, and strengthened legal protections are essential. Broader social change may be supported through couples-focused workshops and the promotion of egalitarian family models. Strategic collaboration among

religious leaders, community elders, and women's organizations can further help reframe cultural narratives toward partnership, respect, and equality.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that women's submissiveness in marriage is a socially constructed outcome of entrenched cultural, religious, and traditional gender norms. Persistent inequalities in power, decision-making, and emotional reciprocity contribute to psychosocial distress, including low self-esteem, isolation, and marital dissatisfaction. Norms related to silence, family honor, and joint-family structures further reinforce female compliance. These patterns are not isolated but sustained across generations, reflecting a broader global challenge with lasting psychological and relational consequences.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, F., & Iqbal, H. (2019). Self-Silencing and marital adjustment in women with and without depression. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research*, 34(2), 311-330. <https://doi.org/10.33824/pjpr.2019.34.2.17>
- Akyunus, M., & Gültekin, B. F. (2023). Representations of the early maladaptive schemas on the interpersonal circumplex. *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy*, 16(2), 161-178. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41811-023-00157-1>
- Ali, P. A., & Gavino, M. I. B. (2008). Violence against women in Pakistan: A framework for analysis. *Journal-Pakistan Medical Association*, 58(4), 198.
- Ali, T. S., Krantz, G., Gul, R., Asad, N., Johansson, E., & Mogren, I. (2011). Gender roles and their influence on life prospects for women in urban Karachi, Pakistan: A qualitative study. *Global Health Action*, 4(1), 7448. <https://doi.org/10.3402/gha.v4i0.7448>
- Ali, T. S., Krantz, G., Gul, R., Asad, N., Johansson, E., & Mogren, I. (2011). Gender roles and their influence on life prospects for women in urban Karachi, Pakistan: A qualitative study. *Global Health Action*, 4(1), 7448. <https://doi.org/10.3402/gha.v4i0.7448>
- Andersen, S., Ertac, S., Gneezy, U., List, J. A., & Maximiano, S. (2013). Gender, competitiveness, and socialization at a young age: Evidence from a matrilineal and a patriarchal society. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 95(4), 1438-1443. <https://research.cbs.dk/en/publications/gender-competitiveness-and-socialization-at-a-young-age-evidence>
- Andersson, L. (2023). Gender-equal parental leave and marital equity in Sweden. *Scandinavian Journal of Social Policy*, 55(1), 112-130. https://ideas.repec.org/p/hhs/ifswps/2005_011.html
- Babul, H., & Niaz, B. (2019). Portrayal of women in Pakistani drama: An analysis of selected dramas. *Balochistan Review*, 40(1), 328-338. <https://doi.org/10.71016/hnjss/ca5spg64>
- Begum, M. F. (2016). Consciousness raising: A collective action for women empowerment. *Journal of English language and literature*, 3(2), 14-19. <http://www.joell.in/>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Çelik, E., & İskender, M. (2015). Ambivalent Sexism, Submissive Behaviors, and Positive and Negative Affect as Predictor of Marital Adjustment. *International Journal of Educational Researchers*, 6(3), 1-14. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/89923>

- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268.
https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1104_01
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268.
https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1104_01
- Dolan, E. W. (2020, July 26). Study on traditional gender role beliefs suggests greater submission can undermine marital adjustment. *PsyPost - Psychology News*. <https://www.psypost.org/study-on-traditional-gender-role-beliefs-suggests-greater-submission-can-undermine-marital-adjustment/>
- Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (2012). Social role theory. *Handbook of theories of social psychology*, 2(9), 458–476.
- Farrell, A. K., Simpson, J. A., & Rothman, A. J. (2015). The relationship power inventory: Development and validation. *Personal Relationships*, 22(3), 387–413.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12072>
- Finn, P., & Laaboudi, D. (2024). Submissive housewives, unfaithful spouses, dysfunctional marriages and violence: the portrayal of gender roles and marriage in Moroccan jokes. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 1–21.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2024.2349049>
- Gilbert, P. (2000). Varieties of submissive behavior as forms of social defense: Their evolution and role in depression. In *Subordination and defeat* Routledge.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2000-07594-001>
- Gilbert, P., & Allan, S. (1994). Assertiveness, submissive behaviour and social comparison. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 33(3), 295–306.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8260.1994.tb01125.x>
- Gilbert, P., Cheung, M. S., Grandfield, T., Campey, F., & Irons, C. (2003). Recall of threat and submissiveness in childhood: Development of a new scale and its relationship with depression, social comparison and shame. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, 10(2), 108–115.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.359>
- Gillard, J. A., Gormley, S., Griffiths, K., Hitchcock, C., Dagleish, T., & Stretton, J. (2021). Converging evidence for enduring perceptions of low social status in individuals in remission from depression. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 294, 661–670.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2021.07.083>
- Gupta, S., & Arditti, J. A. (2023). Women at the margins: Experiences with spousal incarceration in India. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 15(2), 313–331.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12498>
- Johnson, S. L., Leedom, L. J., & Muhtadie, L. (2012). The dominance behavioral system and psychopathology: Evidence from self-report, observational, and biological studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(4), 692–743.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027503>
- Karakurt, G., & Silver, K. E. (2013). Emotional abuse in Intimate relationships: the role of gender and age. *Violence and Victims*, 28(5), 804–821.
<https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.vv-d-12-0004>

- Khatun, N. M., & Islam, N. A. (2023). Ancient civilizations and marriage: A comparative study of customs, traditions, and rituals in Sumerian, Babylonian, Persian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Chinese, European, African and American cultures. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 8(2), 27-53. <https://doi.org/10.58885/ijssh.v08i2.27.mk>
- Kumar, L. M., Stephen, J., George, R. J., & Babu, L. (2022). He hit me; but it's okay! Female submissiveness in marital abuse: A review in Indian context. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 11(2), 447-452. https://doi.org/10.4103/jfmpe.jfmpe_1870_21
- Lampis, J., Cataudella, S., Agus, M., Busonera, A., & Skowron, E. A. (2018). Differentiation of self and dyadic adjustment in couple relationships: A dyadic analysis using the actor-partner interdependence model. *Family Process*, 58(3), 698-715. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12370>
- Mumtaz, Z., & Salway, S. (2009). Understanding gendered influences on women's reproductive health in Pakistan: Moving beyond the autonomy paradigm. *Social Science & Medicine*, 68(7), 1349-1356. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.01.025>
- Naeem, B., & Chaman, A. (2022). The Association of adverse self-silencing and marital conflict with symptoms of depression and dissociation in married Madrassa and Non-Madrassa women: A Cross-sectional Study. *Nature-Nurture Journal of Psychology*, 2(2), 30-40.
- Naeem, B., Aqeel, M., & De Almeida Santos, Z. (2021). Marital Conflict, self-silencing, dissociation, and depression in married Madrassa and Non-Madrassa women: A multilevel mediating model. *Nature-Nurture Journal of Psychology*, 1(2), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.53107/nnjp.v1i2.11>
- Patel, T. A., & Cogle, J. R. (2023). Submissive behavior as a transdiagnostic construct: Associations with internalizing symptoms and distress intolerance. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 79(5), 1314-1327. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.23478>
- Rahman, M. M. (2023). A Psychosocial comparative analysis of woman in Islam and woman in feminism. *Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ss.20231206.17>
- Rehman, A., Muhammad, F., Mukhtar, L., & Batool, K. (2024). Perceived gender stereotype and quality of marriage in married women: Mediating role of self-silencing. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 3(1), 567-580.
- Sardenberg, C. (2016). Liberal vs. liberating empowerment: A Latin American feminist Perspective on conceptualising women's empowerment. *IDS Bulletin*, 47(2). <https://doi.org/10.19088/1968-2016.115>
- Sultana, A. (2012). Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis. *Arts Faculty Journal*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.3329/afj.v4i0.12929>