

## **MORE MATERIALISM, LESS MARITAL SATISFACTION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF GRATITUDE**

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### **Abstract**

*Materialism has been consistently regarded with less satisfaction with life in general. This may be explained as people who hold materialistic values are less grateful and therefore, consequently are either not satisfied or less satisfied with their relationships and life (overall). The present research investigated how being grateful would affect the marital satisfaction of married individuals, holding high materialistic values. Married individuals (N = 200), through purposive and convenient sampling technique, responded on a booklet comprised of Gratitude Questionnaire (McCullough et al., 2002), Materialistic Values Scale (Richins & Dawson, 1992) and Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm et al., 1983). Results indicated satisfactory reliability of the instruments of the study. Hypotheses testing revealed significant positive associations between gratitude and marital satisfaction. However, materialism was found to be negatively associated with both gratitude and marital satisfaction. Similar, results were further indicated in the prediction analysis which was further confirmed through*

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*mediation analysis as gratitude mediated the association. These findings of the study could be helpful for professionals in the field in the current scenario of the pandemic. As the pandemic is not over yet, and the economies are facing numerous challenges which has affected the family life of individuals.*

**Key words:** *Gratitude, Materialism, Marital satisfaction, Mediation.*

## **Introduction**

Humans are social-being and to live in a society they have to form relationships. The mutual co-existence within these relationships is very important. If the nature of the relationship is congenial the life goes on without coming across many of the psychological problems that are faced by the people who are part of a relationship that is unfriendly. Marriage is one of the most important social institutions for living a sound and contented life. It unites the two opposite sexes, so that they can satisfy their biological and social needs (Ahmad & Zadeh, 2007). It is known to be the positive feelings felt by a married individual indicating; the communication between the couple, to what extent disputes are solved, and how issues or problems are communicated to each other (Mitchell & Boster, 1998). It further indicates a state of wellbeing achieved by the couple (Fincham, 2011; Kamp Dush et al., 2008), and an overall assessment of a person for state of the relationship in terms of happiness and functioning of marriage (Schoen et al., 2002). Maintaining a certain level of satisfaction is a crucial task in every marriage and is not achieved easily. However, the current economic conditions have made it more difficult than it already is.

Materialism is the belief that, it is important to attain financial success, nice possessions, the right image, and high status (Kasser et al., 2004). Materialistic people tend to be less satisfied with life in general and specifically with their

relationships (Caroll et al., 2011; McCullough et al., 2002; Polak & McCullough, 2006) with their friends, and have lower self-esteem than their non-materialistic counterparts (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Love of money and healthy relationships often cannot co-exist (Capetto & Tadros, 2021) because materialistic individuals abandon other pursuits in his or her life. Time and resources are spent on attaining material things for happiness (Gardner, 2001; Richins & Dawson, 1992) while relationships are neglected (Capetto & Tadros, 2021; Kasser, 2002). Therefore, holding on to material things and beliefs negatively impact relationships (Belk, 1984; Richins, 1995; & Sirgy, 1998). It can be concluded that satisfaction of the marital union depends on how the married couple sees towards money and all the other materialistic things. Holding on to materialistic values is crucial and cannot be ignored; therefore, the present research aims to examine how despite of holding materialistic values, marital satisfaction can be achieved among married individuals in the difficult times, when nothing makes sense.

Gratitude is reciprocal of materialism, it overcome the negative effects caused by materialism with in marital satisfaction and is termed as being grateful for what we have in our lives, knowing that better time and things are on their way. It is an effective emotion a person receives (McCullough et al., 2001; Polak & McCullough, 2006), an awareness and thankfulness of a person for all the good and positive things (Seligman et al., 2005). It is more than a simple thank you, more specifically, not complaining about the hardships of the life. Within the marital union, gratitude boosts up positivity and mitigates the negative impact of negative factors (Watkins et al., 2003). As individuals who acknowledge gratitude tend to score high on life satisfaction and other positive aspects of life (Froh et al., 2011; McCullough et al., 2004). These expressions of thankfulness provide a scope of constructive insight to the partners which consequently yield a beneficial

outcome (Baucom & Epstein, 1990) in terms of positive perception about the other partner enhance (Lambert & Fincham, 2011) as compared to individuals who control their emotions. Similar findings were reported in a daily diary method of Emmons and McCullough (2003), people who wrote about the things they were grateful for over a 3 week had greater health and less materialistic thoughts.

Contrary to the international literature, indigenous literature indicates religious practice and religious commitment of couples (Aman et al., 2019), communication, education of partner, sexual satisfaction, compromise, better in-laws relationships along with dual earning (Ayub & Iqbal, 2012) as important indicators of marital satisfaction. Other than these social indicators or dynamics to the best of researcher's knowledge, the topic is not explored in Pakistani context. Therefore, the findings of the present paper would certainly contribute in the indigenous literature.

Based on the literature the study aims to examine the association between the study variable as well to examine gratitude as mitigating factor between materialism and marital satisfaction of the married individuals.

Hence, the present study hypothesized: (i) positive association between gratitude and marital satisfaction, (ii) negative association of materialism with both gratitude and marital satisfaction, (iii) mediating role of gratitude between materialism and marital satisfaction.

## **Method**

### **Sample and Research Design**

Married individuals ( $N = 200$ ) with an age range of 21 to 55 years ( $M = 34.14$ ,  $SD = 9.68$ ) through purposive and convenient sampling were recruited to participate in this cross-sectional study.

## Instruments

In order to measure the variables three scales were used.

**Gratitude Questionnaire.** (McCullough et al., 2002). The six-item questionnaire on a 7-point Likert scale was used to assess individual differences in the proneness to experience gratitude in daily life. The authors reported satisfactory Cronbach alpha reliability ( $\alpha = .74$  to  $.84$ ) of the questionnaire (with reverse items 3 and 6).

**Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale.** (Schumm et al., 1983). The 3-item scale was used to efficiently assess marital satisfaction on a 7 point Likert scale. The composite score ranges from 3 to 21 with satisfactory  $\alpha = .93$ .

**Materialistic Values Scale.** (Richins & Dawson, 1992). An 18-item measure of materialistic values scale (seven items measure *centrality*, five items measure *happiness*, and six items measure *success*) was used to measure materialism on a 5-point Likert scale with score ranges from 18-90 and satisfactory Cronbach alpha estimates ( $\alpha = .80$  to  $.88$ ).

## Procedure

The participants of the study were approached at their homes, offices, and institutions to participate in the research. After briefly explaining the nature of the research, they were requested to voluntarily participate. They were further assured of the confidentiality of their responses. At the end, they were thanked for their cooperation and participation by the researcher.

## Results

The data was analyzed for hypotheses testing on SPSS (20 Version). The descriptive analysis revealed satisfactory reliability estimates except for gratitude ( $\alpha = .49$ ). Reliability analysis (if item deleted) was carried out, and the analysis

indicated that the reliability estimate can be increased to .64 after deleting item 6. Hence, after carefully (qualitative and quantitative) analysis of the item, this item was dropped from the final calculation.

**Table 1:** *Reliability & Correlations of Marital Satisfaction, Gratitude, & Materialism (N = 200).*

	Variables	$\alpha$	2	3
1	Marital Satisfaction	.96	.33**	-.15*
2	Gratitude	.64	-	-.28*
3	Materialistic Values	.71	-	-

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 1 indicates satisfactory reliability of the instruments of the study as well as the significant association between variables of the study. As the correlations explained the association between the variables. Hierarchical regression analysis was carried out to examine the mediating role of gratitude in explaining the association between materialism and marital satisfaction.

**Table 2:** *Hierarchical Regression Analysis for gratitude Mediating the relation between Marital Satisfaction and Materialism (N = 200)*

Predictor	$\Delta R^2$	$B$	$F$
Step 1 ( $R = .15$ , $R^2 = .02$ )			
Materialism	.02	-.15*	4.76
Step 2 ( $R = .34$ , $R^2 = .11$ )			
Materialism		-.07	
Gratitude	.10	.31**	12.60
$R^2$	.11		

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$ .

The Table indicates that the variance accounted for gratitude as a mediator increased from mere 2 % to 11 %. This explains that significant mitigating impact of gratitude on marital satisfaction affected by the materialistic beliefs. The mediation analysis of the present study was further supported by Sobel test (1982). The test statistic verified the effect of predictor on the outcome variable. A significant  $p < .01$  value in Sobel test signifies the mediation and indicate that gratitude mediated the relationship between materialism and marital satisfaction ( $z = -3.3$ ,  $**p < .01$ ).

## **Discussions**

The results of the study provided a framework the positive factors that could alter the impact of negative factors on marital relationships. The results proved all the hypotheses of the study. Negative association of materialism and marital satisfaction as supported by literature (Capetto & Tadros, 2021) could further be explained that healthy and strong relationships cannot be possible with love of money and worldly possessions. Any individual spending time in generating financial resources would more likely be ignoring the other significant pursuits of life including relationships (Kasser, 2002). This devaluation of relationship in pursuit of obtaining worldly possessions takes their natural toll on the relationships. They seek happiness in materialistic possessions rather than their relationships (Dean et al., 2007; Rischins & Dawson, 1992). In developing countries, with the harsh aspect of unemployment and poverty, materialism does not necessarily mean luxurious life. However, monetary conflict is the most reoccurring and the most unresolved issue between couples which ultimately depicts low level of marital satisfaction (Papp, 2009).

The results further confirmed positive association between gratitude and marital satisfaction. Fredrickson (2004) elaborated that positive emotions act as a

cognitive resource which yield a positive environment, where individuals are grateful and recognize their partner's care and support ultimately increasing their marital satisfaction (Gordon & Baucom 2009). Married individuals are more likely to reciprocate the positive or grateful events by their spouse (McCullough et al., 2001). The expression of thankfulness may be different but the intention is same.

Gratitude and materialism are two sides of the same coin, which explain the negative association between them as hypothesized (Lambert et al., 2008). As per value theory, higher affection of gratefulness would have fewer tendencies for materialism as gratitude represent opposing value system (Bilsky & Schwartz, 1994). Gratitude is mainly associated with intrinsic value and is related to goals of community and affiliation (Emmons 2007), it tends to conflict with materialistic goals.

Lastly, gratitude mitigated the association between materialism and marital satisfaction. Married individuals who hold materialistic beliefs, can have quality association by incorporating gratitude in their life (Burchan, 2012). This endorsement of materialistic values won't affect the sacred union if accompanied with small gestures of thankfulness (Polak & McCullough, 2006).

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The findings of the present research considering the current pandemic and financial crisis would be affective for low-middle-income countries where with minimal efforts (saying thank you) can restore the satisfaction. However, these small tokens of appreciations would be more effective if social dynamics are taken into consideration as well. These findings could further be helpful in family and marital therapy to minimize the fluctuating trend of divorce.



## Limitations & Suggestions

Although the study provided its uniqueness, however, it is not without its limitations. Data was collected only from the married individuals and the results might have provided an elaborative picture if married couples were taken as participants. Future research could examine this association in the married couples.

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