# Mediating Role of Fear of Negative Evaluation and Self-Doubt in Paths Between Gaslighting and Cognitive Failure in Married Women

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One of the widespread problems faced by married women is gaslighting, also known as psychological manipulation. The present research was intended to explore the relationship between gaslighting and cognitive failure with mediating role of self-doubt and fear of negative evaluation in married women. The phenomenon of gaslight is a form of psychological abuse which does not have any overt impacts rather it gradually attacks victim's sense of self and perceptions. Such consequences lead to emergence of self-doubt, fear of being negatively evaluated by others, and ultimately leading to cognitive failure which needs attention. For present study, sample size of 284 married women was taken via purposive sampling technique. Four standardized assessment measures that is the Gaslight Questionnaire (Stern, 2009), Cognitive Failure Questionnaire (Broadbent et al., 1982), Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (Leary, 1983), and Self-Doubt Scale (Oleson et al., 2000) were used to assess study variables. Results indicated that gaslighting had significant positive relationship with fear of negative evaluation, self-doubt, and cognitive failure. Gaslighting and self-doubt emerged as positive predictors of cognitive failure. Self-doubt appeared as a significant mediator in relationship between gaslighting and cognitive failure. Study findings would help the therapists to foresee adverse effects of gaslighting, self-doubt, and fear of negative evaluation on cognitive failure in gaslighting. Furthermore, study will provide baseline knowledge to plan interventions to minimize or avoid cognitive failure in married women.

*Keywords.* Gaslighting, fear of negative evaluation, self-doubt, cognitive failures

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While looking into psychological abuse, the most commonly reported problem is being gaslighted in interpersonal relationships which sometimes go unreported by the victim unless this phenomenon starts showing its impacts on psychological and cognitive health. Gaslighting has the purpose to manipulate someone psychologically in order to gain control over other's thoughts and gradually making them question their own perceptions, thoughts, memory, and experiences. It mainly targets ones self-confidence and reality perception. This phenomenon is very common in every setting and culture. If we look into our cultural and family dynamics, we can spot this phenomenon occurring in interpersonal relationships in every other household. In clinical settings, widely reported problem by married women is such psychological manipulation faced by them in their household that it starts to impact their personal and social lives (Bhatti et al., 2023). In addition to that their mental health and psychological wellbeing is also greatly impacted. Such impacts include loss of self-confidence, fear of being negatively evaluated, increased tendency to get triggered even in non triggering situations, emergence of self-doubt, loss of focus, forgetfulness, and many more unusual tendencies (Capezza et al., 2021). In Pakistani society, very few women are able to identify that they are being psychologically manipulated by others which leads to drastic mental health breakdowns and even lifelong impacts on their overall personality. It is very important to figure out such mentally controlling behaviors by the partners, so that impact one mental health leading to fear of being negatively evaluated, self-doubt, and consequently cognitive failure could be understood.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), reports that intimate partner abuse is one of the most common forms of violence against women and includes physical, psychological, sexual, and emotional abuse and controlling behaviors from an intimate partner. It occurs in all contexts and among all socio-economic, religious, and cultural groups, but the overwhelming global burden of interpersonal violence falls mostly on women (Potter, 2021). Being psychologically abused or criticized such as insults (Dokkedahl et al., 2019), belittling (Neuhart et al., 2020), constant humiliation (Stephenson et al., 2018), intimidation (Aizpurua et al., 2021), and threats of harm (Capezza et al., 2021) by the spouse is one of the most common problems confronted by married women in Pakistani society, creating a surreal and long-term influence on emotional and psychological health of the victim (Bhatti et al., 2023)

Gaslighting is considered as most impactful form of psychological abuse. It is different from other forms of abuse because of its covert nature. Other types of abuse have its overt indicators and anybody can

see and identify its impacts such as physical signs, behavioral signs including over controlling behavior or use of abusive language. However, in case of gaslighting in interpersonal violence, it comes on covert and discrete level. Its impact takes plenty of time to come to the surface and become evident (March et al., 2025).

Being constantly gaslighted creates a feeling of self-doubt, fear of being evaluated negatively, worthlessness, and hypersensitivity to even minor provocation in victim (Miano et al., 2021). Gaslighting is considered to be a form of psychological abuse in which the abuser has two main motives, namely "the thirst for power and control" (Wagers, 2015). As other types of abuse persist over time, gaslighting mostly continues for an extended period. In addition, when it comes to the characteristics of a gaslighter, one has difficulty in dealing with recognizing and communicating his emotions. One suffers from low self-esteem and a strong sense of helplessness, so these factors increase desire to gaslight and feel their dominance over the victim (Smith, 2007). Women have shattered self-image and their cognitive have also diminished which eventually leads to cognitive failure (Dickson et al., 2023). Cognitive failure occurs in the daily routine tasks in which the victim has memory lapses and perceptual disturbances, and the person is not able to do the tasks as he used to do on a daily basis earlier (Ali, 2013).

Numerous researches in Pakistan have associated gaslighting to severe mental and psychological health problems. Such psychological manipulation has found to be positively associated with psychiatric distress (Bhatti et al., 2023), social anxiety (Naeem et al., 2008), fear of being assessed negatively (Moody, 2019), and low self-confidence (Farooq et al., 2024). In another research, it was concluded that the self-doubt of women experiencing gaslighting as well as physical violence in Pakistan was higher than females who had not experienced violence (Tariq, 2013).

Regarding the impacts of gaslighting, some research results indicate that women who experience constant psychological and emotional abuse from spouses are generally diagnosed with anxiety and stress disorders (Kurniawan et al., 2021), depression (Dickson et al., 2023), obsessive compulsive disorder (Sanghai, 2023), hypertension (Stark, 2010), low self-confidence (Roush, 2017), and they are also at risk of other psychosomatic complaints (Moody, 2019). They are unable to manage their everyday dealings with confidence and pride (Watkins, 2014). They are very unenthusiastic and reserved in continuing their duties and giving a cheery guise overall. It is apparent from the research that intimate partner violence (physical or psychological) turns to have damaging impacts on females' physical

and mental health in terms of reduced self-efficacy, anxiety, augmented humiliation, decreased cognitive ability, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Rhatigan, 2011).

The term *self-doubt* is defined as a lack of confidence in one's abilities, motivations, beliefs and judgments (Van den Bos et al., 2010). It is about not trusting one's own abilities to perform a task that includes decision-making, judgment-making, or the use of instincts (Roush, 2017). Persistent self-doubt leads the individual to mental collapse and affects their thought process, causing a series of psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, mood disorders, hypervigilance, fear of being evaluated negatively by others, etc. (Schechter, 2013). As the phenomenon of gaslight directly attacks the victim's sense of reality while there are attempts to manipulate their sense of reality and the way they perceive different scenarios thus undermining the victim's orientation towards reality (Bhatti et al., 2023). Resultantly, the victim begins to believe that they are incompetent, impaired, and unable to function properly even in daily routine tasks (Dorpat, 1996).

Watson and Friend (1969) were the first to define *fear of negative evaluation* as a concern for the ratings of others around oneself; being anxious and preoccupied with the negative ratings and comments of others; and the expectations of negative evaluations by some of them (Watson & Friend, 1969). Constant invalidation and repeated manipulations makes the victims more prone to self-image related problems which includes negative self-perceptions and fear of being negatively evaluated by others (Aurangzeb et al., 2023). Gaslighting affects the way a person interacts with the world, as the perpetrators put the victim in a defensive position, eventually becoming alert, developing a fear of being judged by others, and also becoming aware of what one says and thinks, persuaded that all their cognitions are failing (Simon & Foley, 2011). In Pakistani society, due to gender inequality this phenomenon is widely common where women are being exposed to such psychological abuse where they begin to doubt their competency and judgments (Farooq et al., 2024).

Clinical and nonclinical people alike perceive slight thinking errors in their daily lives as *cognitive failure*. A cognitive error that occurs when a person is undertaking a task that they usually manage to complete effectively, is also identified as distraction. Blunders or mistakes made due to recklessness or memory impairment are also known as distractions (Reason & Mycielska, 1982). Broadbent et al. (1982) called cognitive failure a slip of the memory where actions do not fulfill a person's intention. In addition, it is more likely to be forgetful about attention, perception, and actions. Cognitive failure is

described as the inability to complete tasks that are ordinarily completed on a daily basis satisfactorily. Forgetting appointments, leaving mail unread for days, failing to notice road signs, and having to reread sections of literature are just a few examples. Such failure in daily activities are due to underlying problems with general cognitive functions related to distraction and memory (Payne & Schnapp, 2014).

When Pakistani culture is considered, it is very common for men to exercise power and control over their partners which, in the long run, create marked impact on mental health which may go unnoticed by the victim or their family members. Most common consequences reported in clinical settings are diminished self-image and emergence of cognitive errors where a victim fails to execute daily life activities which are a major indicator of cognitive failure (Omran et al., 2024). In Pakistani society, at the time of marriage women are trained to long for relationship, a conditioning that make them vulnerable to the exploitation of their attachment, which comes under umbrella of gaslight (Naeem et al., 2008).

Different impacts of family systems on the degree of being gaslighted and its possible effects on psychological health are also present. According to earlier research, 19.09% females of joint families experience psychological distress such as attention and concentration issues, forgetfulness, confusion, unable to trust one's own capabilities, and domestic violence in comparison to 3.33% females of nuclear families (Bansal et al., 2014). Fear of evaluation and being conscious has been more common among married women living in joint (in-laws) family. Furthermore, psychological health of married women living with in-laws seems to be compromised in comparison to women who live in nuclear family system with their spouses (Sadiq, 2012).

Other potential factors like the type of marriage in which two partners are tied in might have potential impact on the degree of gaslight and its related psychological consequences. Manipulative tactics seem to be more common in women with love marriage, as reported by them; they considered such manipulative statements as remarks by spouse out of love. They were unable to distinguish between reality and proposed realism created by their spouses because they began to think that their thinking capability might be limited and inoperable because their partners do not approve any of their point of view (Epstein, 2017). Women with love marriage tend to have more impacts of gaslight on their psychological health because they consider that manipulative statements by their partners are just out of love whereas women with arranged marriage seem to have more realistic and rational approach in understanding manipulative tactics (Bhatti et al., 2023).

**Sociological Theory of Gaslighting**

Unlike other psychological approaches to gaslighting, a sociological theory of gaslighting demonstrates how macro-level social inequities translate into micro-level abuse strategies. In relationships where one person is considered superior over another by various reasons, in such scenarios if that partner tries to gaslight the other then it only serves to make victim's life more miserable as it will create the sense of irrationality in all the perspectives of reality (Stark, 2010). There are two levels to the theoretical framework given here. First, when gaslighting is used in close relationships with uneven power, it creates a "surreal" atmosphere. Second, when gaslighters use gender stereotypes, inequities, and institutional susceptibilities against victims, gaslighting works. This latter argument is significant because gaslighting is a gendered phenomenon since women lack the cultural, economic, and political capital required to gaslight males. In fact, it is used by men against women, and gaslighting tactics turn women into victims of feminine insanity. Such responses as consequences of the phenomenon of gaslight give rise to multiple psychological and cognitive issues. Women start questioning their sanity, lose interest in daily chore, develop a feeling of incompetence and most importantly they start to face cognitive failures in daily routine chores.

**Learned Helplessness Theory**

This theory was conceptualized and developed by American psychologist Martin Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania in the late 1960s and 1970s. Learned helplessness theory holds that when an organism is forced to endure aversive stimuli, such as painful or unpleasant stimuli, it becomes unable or unwilling to avoid future confrontations with these stimuli, even if they are "escapable," presumably because it has learned that it cannot control the situation (Seligman, 1972). As gaslighter destroys the victim so skillfully and slowly that the victim does not realize that one is entangled in a sick relationship, her self-confidence gradually weakens. The perpetrator uses strategies of mental manipulation of violent people who exercise control through micro-regulation of the victims' daily life activities, self-image, and sense of reality (Hardesty et al., 2016). The victims begin to feel that they do not have the power to change, as they have been subjected to frequent gas attacks, including belittling, demeaning suggestions and thoughts, etc. The victim feels like going mad, is emotionally unstable, and no longer has confidence in oneself but only in perpetrator. So that is how the theory of learned helplessness works in the case of interpersonal psychological violence. This surreal

environment of mistrust, self-doubt and confusion in victim's mind leads to emergence of fear of being negatively evaluated. And when this situation persists over time then it gives rise to cognitive failures in daily life chores which victim used to perform effectively prior to this impact.

The phenomenon of gaslight is one of the most unpleasant and sophisticated forms of violence. This affects the mental health of women, leading to questioning of their own thoughts which resultantly causes cognitive failure. The effects of gaslighting tactics cause confusion, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, the urge to retire, and can even lead to psychosis (Burnett, 2020). Numbers of researches are done on gaslight but fewer researches focus on impacts of this phenomenon on married women's mental health which includes cognitive failure. So, there is a dire need to explore the phenomenon of gaslight and its negative effects on married women. The purpose of this study is to determine the link between gas lighting and cognitive failure in married women, as well as the mediation function of self-doubt and fear of negative evaluation in leading towards cognitive failure.

**Hypotheses**

To achieve the objectives of the study the following hypothesis were formulated:

1. Gaslighting will be positively related to self-doubt, fear of negative evaluation, and cognitive failure in married women.
2. Gaslighting, self-doubt, and fear of negative evaluation will positively predictor cognitive failure in married women.
3. Self-doubt and fear of negative evaluation will mediate the relationship between gaslighting and cognitive failure in married women.

## Method

### Sample

The current study is based on cross sectional research design. The data were collected from sample ($N = 284$) of married women with 1 to 5 years of marriage ($n = 187$) and 6 to 10 years of marriage ($n = 97$). The data was collected only through online mode by using through purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The initial participants were asked to refer other married women in their social networks to the study, as it helped to get access to the desired sample easily. Working

and non-working married women and married women from nuclear and joint family system were included in this research. Whereas married women with more than 10 years of marriage were excluded. The participants of the study had minimum 14 years of education. All the scales were administered in English.

**Measures**

### The Gaslight Questionnaire

The Gaslight Questionnaire (GQ) developed by Stern (2009) was developed to measure the effects of gaslight on individuals. The 20 items ranged from 0 to 9 and demonstrated very good internal consistency with $\alpha = .87$. The response option varies from *never* to *almost daily* (Stern, 2009). Simply add up the scores of the 20 individual items score to get the entire score of the scale, which ranges from 0-180, with higher scores indicating more gaslight and vice versa.

### Cognitive Failure Questionnaire

The Cognitive Failure Questionnaire, developed by Broadbent et al. (1982), was used to assess cognitive failure. The most direct way to find out total score the scale, the researcher is required to add all the ratings of the 25 individual items, which yield a score from 0-100. Scores on the scale foretell incidents of absent-mindedness in everyday life which might include slow performance on attention and concentration seeking tasks, traffic and job-related work, and disremembering to save one's information on the computer. When the scores are summed up across the relevant items, it yield scores for subscale demonstrating the dimensions of Forgetfulness (Items 1, 2, 5, 7, 17, 20, 22, and 23): "A tendency of an individual to forget something well-known or planned, for instance, appointments, names and words"; Distractibility (Items 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 19, 21, and 25): "Occurs mainly in social interactions or relations with other people such as being absentminded or being easily disturbed in one's intensive attention"; and False Triggering (Items 2, 3, 5, 6, 12, 18, 23, and 24): "The phenomena of broken up processing of categorizations or sequences of motor and cognitive actions".

### Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, Straight Forward Items (BFNE-S)

The BFNE-S is an 8-item version of the BFNE (Leary, 1983) that is designed to assess negative evaluation fears (e.g., "When I'm talking

to someone, I'm worried about what they're thinking about me"). It consists of eight straightforwardly phrased items (items 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12) derived from the original BFNE with an internal consistency of .92 and good reliability (Leary, 1983). Each individual item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, which range from 0 (*Not at all characteristics of me*) to 4 (*Extremely characteristic of me*). To get the total score, it is suggested to simply sum up the ratings of the 8 individual items, yielding a score from 0-32.

### Self-Doubt Scale

The Self-Doubt Scale is derived from the Subjective Overachievement Scale (SOS) developed by Oleson et al. (2000), which consists of two separate subscales that assess individual differences in self-doubt and concern with performance. The Self-Doubt Subscale includes eight items and is linked to measures that assess negative affectivity (e.g., self-esteem, social anxiety) and other self-related strategies that are linked to self-doubt (e.g., self-handicapping, defensive pessimism, impostor phenomenon). The two subscales are presented as one scale, with the nine items measuring concern with performance presented first followed by the eight items measuring self-doubt. Item number 6 and 8 are reversed scored. The scale has response options such as 1 = *Disagree very much*, 2 = *Disagree pretty much*, 3 = *Disagree a little*, 4 = *Agree a little*, 5 = *Agree pretty much,* and 6 = *Agree very much*.

## Procedure

The participants were reached out through purposive sample technique as the target population for the present study was married women with marriage duration of maximum ten years therefore it was collected from married women which including 187 women with one to five years of marriage and 97 with six to ten years of marriage. The data was collected in May 2022 via hardcopy and online google form. Online source for data collection was opted due to pandemic situation (Covid-19). Before using the instruments for the research, permissions were acquired from the authors of respective research tools. The married women were approached in their workplace that is offices and schools for teachers. These married women then sent the online survey to other married women. Group data collection was done mostly with working women and individual data collection with both working and non-working married women. The links were forwarded to the participants who were unable to get hardcopy of the questionnaire. The participants were provided with a brief introduction of the research and

informed consent so that they could have an idea about the study. They were briefed about their right to withdraw from research at any time. Furthermore, they were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality during the research. The demographic sheet along with the questionnaires was provided to the participants. The time duration to complete the questionnaire was about 15 minutes. The questions in the questionnaires were not triggering and were not distressing for any participant. The participants were thanked for their time and anticipation.

## Results

The relationship between variables was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 20) and Process Macro mediation analysis. The reliability analysis was utilized to evaluate the Cronbach Alpha of the study variables.

Table 1: *Correlation Between Gaslighting, Fear of Negative Evaluation, Self-Doubt, Cognitive Failure and Its Subscales (N = 284)*

| Variables | α | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Gaslighting | .86 | - | $.69^{**}$ | $.19^{**}$ | $.41^{**}$ | $.39^{**}$ | $.39^{**}$ | $.41^{**}$ |
| 2. Fear of negative evaluation | .81 | | - | $.29^{**}$ | $.30^{**}$ | $.25^{**}$ | $.31^{**}$ | $.27^{**}$ |
| 3. Self-doubt | .64 | | | - | $.21^{**}$ | $.18^{**}$ | $.21^{**}$ | $.15^{**}$ |
| 4. Cognitive Failure | .91 | | | | - | $.88^{**}$ | $.92^{**}$ | $.90^{**}$ |
| 5. Forgetfulness | .72 | | | | | - | $.70^{**}$ | $.83^{**}$ |
| 6. Distractibility | .85 | | | | | | - | $.73^{**}$ |
| 7. False Triggering | .74 | | | | | | | - |

$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$

The results in Table 1 indicated that gaslighting has significant positive relationship with fear of negative evaluation, self-doubt, cognitive failure, and its subscales. Fear of negative evaluation is significantly positively related to self-doubt and cognitive failure. Self-doubt is also significantly positively related to cognitive failure.

Linear regression was conducted to determine the predictive role of independent variables upon dependent variables that is cognitive failure. The results indicated that gaslighting plays significant role in predicting cognitive failure and its domains in married women in Table 2. Furthermore, it is also exhibited that self-doubt positively predicts cognitive failure in married women except in false triggering. However, fear of negative evaluation does not positively predict cognitive failure in married women.

Table 2: *Gaslighting, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Self-Doubt as Predictors of Cognitive Failure in Married Women (N = 284)*

| Outcomes | Predictors | $B$ | $\beta$ | $SE$ | $t$ | $p$ | 95% CI LL | UL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cognitive Failure | Constant | 18.40 | | 4.95 | 3.72 | .00 | 8.66 | 28.15 |
| | Gaslight | .24 | .40 | .05 | 5.32 | .00 | .15 | .33 |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | -.06 | -.023 | .21 | -.29 | .76 | -.47 | .34 |
| | Self-doubt | .42 | .14 | .17 | 2.46 | .01 | .08 | .74 |
| | $R$ | .43 | | | | | | |
| | $R^2$ | .19 | | | | | | |
| | $F$ | 21.4 | | | | .00 | | |
| | $p$ | | | | | | | |
| Forgetfulness | Constant | 7.18 | | 1.55 | 4.64 | .00 | 4.13 | 10.24 |
| | Gaslighting | .08 | .43 | .01 | 5.67 | .00 | .05 | .10 |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | -.76 | -.09 | .06 | -1.17 | .24 | -.20 | .05 |
| | Self-doubt | .11 | .12 | .53 | 2.15 | .03 | .01 | .21 |
| | $R$ | .41 | | | | | | |
| | $R^2$ | .17 | | | | | | |
| | $F$ | 18.83 | | | | .00 | | |
| | $p$ | | | | | | | |
| Distractibility | Constant | 5.66 | | 1.92 | 2.95 | .00 | 1.88 | 9.44 |
| | Gaslighting | .08 | .32 | 4.33 | 4.33 | .00 | .04 | .11 |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | .04 | .04 | .52 | .52 | .58 | -.12 | .20 |
| | Self-doubt | .16 | .14 | 2.39 | 2.39 | .02 | .03 | .29 |
| | $R$ | .39 | | | | | | |
| | $R^2$ | .16 | | | | | | |
| | $F$ | 17.6 | | | | .00 | | |
| False triggering | Constant | 6.52 | | 1.60 | 4.07 | .00 | 3.38 | 9.67 |
| | Gaslighting | .08 | .43 | .01 | 5.67 | .00 | .05 | .11 |
| | Fear of negative evaluation | -.05 | -.06 | .07 | -.72 | .47 | -.18 | .08 |
| | Self-doubt | .08 | .08 | .05 | 1.54 | .12 | -.02 | .19 |
| | $R$ | .42 | | | | | | |
| | $R^2$ | .18 | | | | | | |
| | $F$ | 19.73 | | | | .00 | | |

Table 3: *Mediating Role of Self-Doubt in Relationship Between Gaslighting and Subscales of Cognitive Failure in Married Women (N = 284)*

| | Gaslighting IV | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total effect | | | Direct effect | | | Indirect effect | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | 95% CI | |
| DVs | *B* | *SE* | *t* | *B* | *SE* | *t* | *B* | *SE* | LL | UL |
| Cognitive Failure | .24 | .03 | 7.56 | .02 | .03 | 7.02 | .01 | .01 | .01 | .03 |
| Forgetfulness | .73 | .01 | 7.13 | .07 | .01 | 6.67 | .00 | .00 | -.01 | .00 |
| Distractibility | .09 | .01 | 6.97 | .08 | .01 | 6.43 | .01 | .00 | .00 | .01 |
| False Triggering | .08 | .01 | 7.52 | .08 | .01 | 7.13 | .00 | .00 | -.00 | .01 |

*Note*. All *t*-values are significant at $p < .001$ level.

To examine the mediating role of fear of negative evaluation and self-doubt in relationship between gaslighting and cognitive failure, mediation analysis through Process Macro with bootstrapped based on 5000 samples (Model-4) is employed. The $R^2$ value for fear of negative evaluation and cognitive failure is .49 whereas $R^2$ value for self-doubt and cognitive failure is .04. The results exhibited that there is significant indirect effect of gaslight on cognitive failure through self-doubt which means that self-doubt mediates the relationship between gaslighting and cognitive failure (Table 3). The results also indicate that there is significant direct effect of gaslighting on cognitive failure and two of its subscales that is forgetfulness and distractibility which means that self-doubt plays mediating role in relationship between gaslighting, and cognitive failure Direct affects are also significant that shows partial mediation of self-doubt in relationship between gaslighting and cognitive failure. However, for false triggering indirect effect in nonsignificant.

Table 4: *Mediating Role of Fear of Negative Evaluation in Relationship between Gaslighting and Cognitive Failure and its Subscales (N = 284)*

| | Gaslighting IV | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total effect | | | Direct effect | | | Indirect effect | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | 95% CI | |
| DVs | *B* | *SE* | *t* | *B* | *SE* | *t* | *B* | *SE* | LL | UL |
| Cognitive Failure | .08 | .02 | 7.52 | .08 | .01 | 5.62 | -.00 | .01 | -.03 | .02 |
| Forgetfulness | .08 | .01 | 7.13 | .08 | .02 | 5.59 | -.01 | .01 | -.17 | .10 |
| Distractibility | .09 | .01 | 6.98 | .08 | .02 | 4.24 | .01 | .01 | -.01 | .04 |
| False Triggering | .08 | .01 | 7.52 | .08 | .01 | 4.62 | -.00 | .01 | -.03 | .02 |

*Note*. All *t*-values are significant at $p < .001$ level.

The results in Table 4 show that there is nonsignificant indirect effect of gaslighting on cognitive failure and its subscales that is forgetfulness, distractibility, and false triggering through fear of negative evaluation. So, it is concluded that fear of negative evaluation does not play mediating role in relationship between gaslighting and cognitive failure.

## Discussion

The goal of the current study was to explore the mediating role of fear of negative evaluation and self-doubt which in paths between gaslighting and cognitive failures among married women. It was hypothesized that there is positive relationship between gaslight, fear of negative evaluation, self-doubt, and cognitive failure. The result indicated that gaslight had significant positive relationship with fear of negative evaluation and self-doubt. According to previous literature, the effects of gaslighting includes self-doubt, doubting one's own abilities and mental state, thus the victim finds herself in the labyrinth of helplessness (Ahern, 2018).

Trächtler (2022) suggests that gaslighters question the reality, judgment, and perceptions of the victim or gaslightee. Through gaslighting, the cognitive faculties of the victim are questioned and disregarded leading to self-doubt in the victim. Another study by Hightower (2017) revealed that the consequences of gaslighting include self-doubt, confusion, reduced self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and even psychosis as the reality of the gaslightee is distorted. These studies corroborate with the findings of the current study that gaslighting is positively related to cognitive failure and self-doubt. Other studies highlight the high levels of fear, especially fear of losing their kids and their own integrity (Sweet, 2019). Moreover, confusion and fear of going crazy and cognitive issues such as memory issues are evident in gaslightees (Kirk-Giannini, 2022, as cited in Aðalsteinsdóttir, 2023). Thus, the empirical evidence highlights the relationship of gaslighting and cognitive failure in married women.

The results of the present study show that gaslighting, fear of negative evaluation, and self-doubt had significant positive relationship with cognitive failure. Furthermore gaslight, fear of negative evaluation and self-doubt also had positive relationship with subscales of cognitive failure that is forgetfulness, distractibility and false triggering. As per previous research findings gaslight is considered as a source of trauma and it is worsened by the betrayal of trust because whatever is happening is not what should happen, thus this dissonance plays a mediating role to cause reality orientation, concentration, and cognitive issues such as cognitive failure (Smith & Freyd, 2013).

It was hypothesized that fear of negative evaluation and self-doubt will likely to mediate the relationship between gaslighting and cognitive failure. The results indicated that self-doubt emerged as a significant mediator in relationship between gaslighting and cognitive failure. Previous literature has conceptualized self-doubt as stemming from the conscious awareness of a strong, undesirable self-image being activated (Jones & Berglas, 1978, as cited by Caroll et al., 2011). As uncertainty about one's future identity begins to rise, so too does the likelihood of increased self-doubt and increased probability of perceptual and cognitive failure (Roeske, 2014). Moreover, the results indicated non significant mediation of fear of negative evaluation in relationship between gaslighting and cognitive failure. Therefore, fear of negative evaluation does not play significant role in causing cognitive failure in married women.

Moreover, analysis was also done to see if fear of negative evaluation and self-doubt play mediating role in between gaslighting and cognitive failure, and its subscales named as forgetfulness, distractibility and false triggering. Results showed self-doubt as a mediator in relationship between gaslighting and distractibility, a subscale of cognitive failure. Prediction Error Minimization (PEM) theoretical framework in context of gaslighting (Klein et al., 2023) explains the role of cognitive processes which include believing that the gaslighter is trustworthy and is in the authority to manipulate the victim's environment causing cognitive and predictive errors. Furthermore, the victim accepts the reality through gaslighter's lens creating prediction errors. Lastly, the gaslightee feels incompetent and self-doubt increases, in turn making them depend on gaslighter. This theoretical framework aligns with the finding of the present study implying mediatory role of self-doubt in association between gaslighting and cognitive failure in married women.

**Limitations and Recommendations**

Due to COVID-19, data collection was not easy, therefore online data collection was done along with face-to-face data collection. Further investigations are needed in area of cognitive failure as it will help the researchers to have deeper knowledge about other potential reasons of cognitive failure in married women. Future studies can use qualitative approach to determine the cultural factors associated with the phenomenon of gaslighting in married women. The current study did not include married women from rural area and other cities of Pakistan which limits the generalizability of results, so to increase generalizability; data can be gathered from other cities and rural areas of Pakistan for further research.

## Implications

The results of present study sheds light on various factors such as gaslighting, fear of being negatively evaluated, and self-doubt which plays their role in causing cognitive failures in married women. The findings show that there is need to develop more awareness among married women about being gaslighted by the partner and how it gradually impacts their mental health. Enhanced knowledge about gaslight phenomena may increase their tolerance and more alternate ways to improve mental health might be adopted by married women.

Furthermore, appropriate mental health interventions should be designed in order to educate and motivate married women to get help in need and have increased awareness about mental health issues. This awareness may also help married women to cope up with difficulties with more adaptive and effective strategies.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, gaslight has significant positive relationship with fear of negative evaluation and self-doubt. It is also concluded that gaslight and self-doubt have significant positive relationship with cognitive failure. This means that if gaslight increases, self-doubt also increases which eventually positively impacts cognitive failure.

Moreover, self-doubt emerged as a significant mediator in relationship between gaslight and cognitive failure whereas fear of negative evaluation did not appear as a significant mediator. These findings suggest that there is a need to develop more awareness among married women about being gaslighted by the partner and how it gradually impacts their mental health. Enhanced knowledge about gaslight phenomena may increase their tolerance and more alternate ways to improve mental health might be adopted by married women.

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