

## **Role of Emotional Intelligence in Marital Relationship**

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The role of emotional intelligence (EI) in various domains has been supported through scientific studies and contemporary psychologists have started to promote this concept for better quality of life (Geher & Renstrom, 2004). Researchers working on issues like marital adjustment, conflict resolution, and domestic violence have recently renewed their interest in the role of EI in marital relationship. The review of studies conducted in west suggests that EI holds moderate to high predictive validity for concurrent marital adjustment. Some components of EI (e.g., optimism, empathy, emotional expressiveness, emotional self awareness, and impulse control) appear to possess greater importance in couples' relationship. Researches done in Pakistan suggest that there is a dire need to investigate the role of emotional intelligence in healthy marriages.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, marital relationship, marital adjustment, conflict resolution, domestic violence

Since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, researchers have been in a continuous struggle to explore that Emotional Intelligence (EI) accounts for variance, which is not accounted for by traditional cognitive intelligence in various domains. The term emotional intelligence formally came in the scenario of psychology with the publication of the article by Salovey and Mayer (1990) providing an initial definition and theory of EI, but the concept got more popularity after the publication of a book titled 'Emotional Intelligence' (Goleman, 1995). There are revolutionary documented findings on

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how emotional reactions and experience affect social interaction, marital adjustment, organizational behavior, and mental health.

Emotional Intelligence like cognitive intelligence is a broad spectrum concept. It has been defined in multiple ways. There is no single comprehensive definition of the concept. Generally EI is defined as an ability to effectively deal with emotions. Boyatzis and Sala (2004) define EI as “a set of competencies or abilities to recognize and use emotional information about oneself and others that leads to or causes effective and superior performance” (p.172).

Two EI models of heterogeneous nature exist in the literature. Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2000) named them as ‘ability’ and ‘mixed’ models. Ability model is defined as a set of information processing abilities (such as actual accuracy in assessing the kinds of emotions expressed by particular faces) that are grouped together into four branches, where skill in the lower branches is essential precursor for skills in the higher branches. Ability model emphasizes on cognitive abilities and usually requires maximal performance. It measures accuracy of responses like I.Q tests and assesses direct handling of emotions. Mixed model assess mental abilities and personality traits (such as empathy). Supporters of mixed model usually rely on self-report as how a person expresses his/her handling of emotions in life.

Despite the bifurcation of conceptualization proponents of both models agree upon certain issues like: People differ in terms of their level of emotional intelligence, emotional intelligence develops with age, emotional intelligence is important in both interpersonal and intrapersonal areas (Geher & Renstrom, 2004).

Marital adjustment is almost a century old issue, being studied by psychologists and sociologists. Relationship quality of married couples is deemed to be of great importance for the stability of the whole family, as husband and wife are the pillars, which hold the family together. Different trends got popularity in different eras to explore factors playing significant role in marital adjustment. The issue of marital adjustment got attention of researchers after the first study by Hamilton (1929). A decade later, after a thought-provoking study found correlation of hundreds of factors with the degree of marital satisfaction experienced by more than 1000 married and 100 divorced couples (Burgess & Wallin, 1944; Corsini, 1956; Locke, 1947; Terman as cited in Burgess & Cottrell, 1939). This study prepared grounds for the test development of marital adjustment.

Hicks and Platt (1970) in a review of researches of 1960s on marital issues reported demographic variables as main correlates of

marital quality. A second body of researches since 1960 investigated specific marital interactions such as finances, sexual relationship, concern regarding children and child rearing, and particular attention has been given to the effects of number and spacing of children on marital satisfaction (Snyder, 1979). Research in the 1980s addressed issues like, economic, religious, and nature of work in the lives of married partners (Barling, 1984; Dudley & Kosinski, 1990; Repetti, 1989; Voydanoff, 1990; Zvonkovic, 1988). The trends of separation, divorce and remarriage also received attention (Price-Bonham & Balswick, 1980). In the 1980s marital quality remained the topic of interest in research, but the trend changed from concurrent to longitudinal investigation (Glenn, 1990).

A plethora of researches in 1990s investigated important personality factors in marital adjustment (Bouchard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 1999; Hjemboe & Butcher, 1991; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kurdek, 1991; Long & Andrew, 1990; Russell & Wells, 1994; Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Snyder & Regts, 1990). In the previous century marriage studies progressed successfully from administering simple self-report measures to new techniques for observation in controlled laboratory conditions—the merging of synchronized data stream using self report information and observation data using time series and sequential analysis (Burman & Margolin, 1992; Gray-little, 1982; Notarius, Benson, Sloane, Vanzetti, & Hornyak, 1989; Raush, Barry, Hertl, & Swain, 1974).

Emotional Intelligence has been suggested to be a paramount factor in adjustment to life in general and work place in particular (Goleman, 1995, 1998). Goleman (1998) proposed a strong relation between EI and successful conflict resolution and couples/interpersonal relationship. He stressed on the importance of empathy in romantic relationship. Current trend in broken marriages and divorces has stirred up the researchers to study the role of emotional intelligence in marital relationship. Emotional forces between wife and husband are much more crucial than other factors affecting marital quality. Rifts in marital life are far more likely to develop if one or both partners have deficits in emotional intelligence. Fitness (2000; 2001) has given vital importance to EI in intimate relationships. According to Fitness, higher EI might enable people to more effectively manage the delicate emotional negotiations (e.g., seeking and granting forgiveness), and that happiness in relationship might depend upon each partner's ability to cope constructively with conflicts and to understand and manage negative emotions like anger and hate. Fitness (2001) suggests that the ability to say sorry and to practice forbearance needs certain emotional skills, like empathy, self

control, and a highly serviceable understanding of human needs and feelings.

### *Emotional Intelligence as a Correlate of Marital Quality*

The role of EI has previously been supported in healthy and unhealthy marriages under different labels (viz., optimism, self actualization, impulse control). These concepts now are being studied under the umbrella of EI. Researches directly exploring the role of trait emotional intelligence in marital quality are few in numbers. The important reason for the paucity of research in the area is the function of newness of the construct (Fitness, 2001).

Researches exploring the role of EI in marital relationship are of exploratory nature (e.g., Gottman & Mifflin, 2002). The critiques of 'mixed model' of EI put down the concepts as overlapping with personality. To rule out this, EI measure was administered along with IQ and Personality tests and EI found to account for greater percentage of variance in marital satisfaction as compared to IQ and personality (Gannon & Ranzijn, 2005).

Michelle (2005) conducted a detailed study by applying Dyadic Adjustment Scale; (DAS; Spanier, 1976) and self-report measure Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i; Bar-On, 1997). Heterosexual couples in a non-clinical setting, married between one to seven years and have never been divorced were engaged in the study. Results showed that there was significant positive correlation between couples' emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction but the individual's EI level and spousal reports of overall marital satisfaction were not significantly related to each other.

Bricker and Rudnick (2005) studied the EI and marital satisfaction with the help of Self Report Inventory (SSRI; Schutte et al., 1998) and the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder & Aikman, 1999). Data was collected from the couples married longer than one year. EI appeared to be significantly and positively correlated with certain aspects of marital satisfaction. The level of female EI was found to have a significant effect on the couple's affective and problem solving communication. Moreover, it was also related to decreased level of male aggression.

Zeidner and Kaluda (2008) examined the role of EI in romantic love among newly wed couples by administering both ability measure of maximal performance of Mayer, Salovey and, Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002a), and

Schutte Self Report Inventory (SSRI; Schutte et al., 1998). EI measured by the both measures showed significant 'actor effects', but did not show 'partner's effect', thus partially supporting the hypotheses that EI predicts romantic love. Both measures of EI showed same pattern of relationship with romantic love in dyadic assessment. Marital partners were not correlated on EI, thus assortative mating for EI was not supported.

### *Role of Spouses' EI Level in Marital Quality*

Brakett, Warner, and Bosco (2005) managed a detailed study investigating the role of EI in relationship quality among couples. Eighty six heterosexual couples married and unmarried from university setting were recruited. Multiple self-report devices to measure of marital relationship like, Quality of Relationship Inventory (QRI; Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991), Relationship Satisfaction Scale (Diener, 1984) and performance based EI measure by Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT, 2002a) were used to find out the facts. There was little evidence that higher EI was associated with the tendency to elicit positive evaluation of dating relationship among dating couples. Dyad comparison showed that both partners low on EI tended to have less positive relationship outcomes than couples in which at least one partner had higher EI. Results suggest that when at least one partner has high EI, couples tended to have more positive relationships.

Schutte et al., (2001) explored the relationship between marital satisfaction and emotional intelligence and results of this study revealed moderate positive relationship between the two variables. Emotional intelligence was measured with Schutte Self Report Index (SSRI, 1998). Partners showed higher marital satisfaction when they reported their spouses as having higher EI level.

### *Self Awareness and Marital Quality*

Self awareness is an important component of emotional intelligence. Researches in the field support strong relationship of self disclosure and marital success. Franzoi, Davis, and Young (1985) analyzed the influence of self awareness and perspective taking on the satisfaction experienced in monogamous, heterosexual relationship and there was positive relationship between the variables. Private self

consciousness was predictive of reported self disclosure, and the self disclosure was predictive of satisfaction in the relationship.

Croyle and Waltz (2002) also investigated the relationship between emotional self awareness and couple's satisfaction. Results indicated that discrepancy between partner's levels of awareness was related to lower satisfaction for both men and women. Moreover, higher awareness of hard emotions (anger and resentment) was found to be associated with decreased relationship satisfaction.

### *Role of Communication (Emotional Expressiveness) in Marital Relationship*

Marital partners' feelings toward each other and the way they express those feelings predict their present/future quality of relationships. Tucker and Horowitz (1981) assessed the important factors in marital adjustment and their interrelatedness, e.g., sexual satisfaction, verbal and non verbal communication, and demographic variables (e.g., age and numbers of years married). Marital adjustment was found to be significantly related to verbal and non verbal communication. Demographic variables were not found to be related to marital satisfaction. Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (1999) in a review of researches concluded that accuracy in expressing and recognizing emotions correlates with couples' reports of marital happiness. A study by Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, and Palfai (1995) revealed positive relationship between emotional clarity measured by self-report Trait Meta Mood Scale (TMMS; Salovey, et al., 1995) and relationship satisfaction in couples. Results were verified by Fitness (2000) in a follow-up study. Degree of emotional engagement rather than the number and nature of conflicts defines the happiness and stability of relationship (Gottman, 1994). Emotional skillfulness plays very positive role in marital life. Cordova, Gee, and Warren (2005) found the ability to communicate emotions significantly associated with self and partners' marital adjustment by administering self-report measures of emotional skillfulness, marital adjustment, and intimate safety. Role of emotional skills like the ability to identify and express emotions, empathize, and manage challenging emotions in the maintenance of healthy marriages was supported from this study.

Yelsma and Marrow (2003) found that when both husbands and wives show difficulties with emotional assertiveness, they impair their own as well as their spousal marital satisfaction. Wives' difficulties with identifying their emotions negatively influenced their own as well as their husbands' marital satisfaction. Self-report measures of

Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20; Bagby, Parker, & Taylor, 1994), and The Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) were used in the study.

Punyanunt-Carter (2004) indicated both married and dating couples high on affectionate communication as satisfied with their relationships. Dating couples were higher on non verbal and verbal affectionate communication than married couples, who were more likely to express supportiveness than dating partners. Mirgain and Cordova (2007) found that women are more skillful in emotional expressiveness as compared to men. They validated the role of emotional skill and communication by combining self report with observation method (synchronized approach) and showed that emotional skills could be reliably observed in couples' interactions. Results supported a model in which emotional skills influence satisfaction through their influence on intimacy.

Wachs and Cordova (2007) conducted a study to find out the relationship of mindfulness, emotional skills, and marital quality on a sample of 33 married couples. Self report measures like, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976), the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (Snyder, 1999), the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20; Bagby, Taylor, & Parker, 1994), and the Self Expression and Control Scale (SECS; Van Elderen, Verkes, Arkesteijn, & Komproe, 1994) were applied in this study as a part of large study on emotional skills (Cordova et al., 2005). Findings of the study supported that emotional skills; ability to identify and express emotions, manage challenging emotions and non rigid, non judgmental attention towards one's ongoing present experiences were both significantly correlated with marital quality and skilled emotion repertoires, especially identification and communication of emotions, as well as regulation of anger expression fully mediated the association between mindfulness and marital quality. Correlation between study variables and demographic variables (e.g., level of education, age, number of children, income level, and years married) were all non significant.

Smith, Heaven, and Ciarrochi (2008) examined trait EI, conflict communication pattern, and relationship satisfaction in 82 cohabitating heterosexual couples (82% married & 18% unmarried). The Trait Emotional Intelligence (TEI) Questionnaire Short Form (Petrides & Furnham, 2006), the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984), and the Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC) Inventory (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000) were used in the study. Couples, who did

not avoid discussion of relationship problems and who rated their partners high on EI were the most satisfied couples. The partners high on EI were more satisfied than the partners with low EI. Communication pattern appeared as a crucial factor in relationship satisfaction. No gender differences were found on all measures. Men and women scores were significantly positively correlated on all conflict communication sub-scales and on relationship satisfaction. Individuals' self reported EI, estimates of their spousal EI, and perception of conflict communication pattern were contingent predictor of relationship satisfaction. Actor or partner's effects or the combination of the two were used for the analysis and the actor variables were the only significant predictors of marital satisfaction. There was no assortative mating for EI, as men and women's scores were not correlating. No demographic variable (e.g., age, income level, length of relationship) appeared as significant predictor in multi level regression.

### *Optimism, Happiness, and Management of Emotions as Correlates of Marital Quality*

Optimism not only links to satisfying happy romantic relationships, but also as enduring resource for romantic unions. Optimist use cooperative problem solving strategies (Assad, Donnellan, & Conger, 2007). When the couples engage in conflict conversation, optimists and their partners see each other as engaging more constructively. Srivastava, Mc Gonigal, Richards, Butler, and Gross (2006) using longitudinal study by applying cross-sectional analysis found that both optimists and their partners indicated greater relationship satisfaction. Optimism not only plays a role in marital adjustment but also in psychological adaptation after marital disruption. Thuen and Rise (2006) took the sample of 658 recently divorced. Bi-variate findings revealed that perceived control and optimism were strongly related to psychological adaptation. Multiple regression analysis showed by including both predictors that optimism had a much larger effect than perceived control. Mehrabian (1998) established the relationship of happiness and marital satisfaction. He used Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance (PAD) model to summarize existing data and to investigate emotional correlates of satisfaction-dissatisfaction at work and marriage. Marital satisfaction was correlated positively with pleasure arousal.



### *Role of Empathy and Self Actualization in Marital Relationship*

It has been verified through studies over time that there is positive and strong relationship between empathy, self actualization and marital satisfaction. Rowan, Compton, and Rust (1995) studied 30 intact couples and indicated that self-actualization and empathy scores were independent predictors of marital satisfaction scores for men, but not for women. Paleari, Regalia, and Fincham (2005) in a longitudinal study investigated the role of empathy in marital quality on a sample of 119 husbands and 124 wives from long and medium term marriage in North Italy and provided data at two time points separated by a six month interval. Results using structural equation model showed that empathy independently predicted concurrent marital forgiveness and forgiveness in turn predicted concurrent marital quality.

### *Role of Impulse Control in Marital Relationship*

Bar-On et al., (2007) in a study found that hostility and anger damage quality of close relationship in marriage. Change in marital adjustment over 18 months of 122 couples was studied by taking concurrent rating of marital adjustment and conflict with self-report measures. In a prospective analysis it was found that wives' hostility and anger were related to marital adjustment. In a hierarchical regression and SEM models wives anger appeared as a unique predictor of both wives' and husbands' adjustment.

### *Role of EI in Conflict Resolution among Couples*

Lower EI may result in relationship dissatisfaction and higher conflicts in couples and higher EI leads to better management of disagreements, which in return may predict less conflict and higher relationship satisfaction. Rusbult, Bissonnette, Arriaga, and Cox (1998) studied the importance of emotional regulation in marital satisfaction. Their work demonstrated that in comparison with unhappy couples, happy spouses were more likely to accommodate than to retaliate during conflict. Fitness (2000) supported the view by finding that partners with high emotional clarity (i.e., clear understanding of their feelings when they are experienced) reported less difficulty in forgiving a person initiating conflict than those with low emotional clarity.

### *EI and Domestic Violence*

Spousal battering is a tragic aspect of marital life. Researches have supported that deficits in various components of EI might be related to an increase in predisposition to be abusive. Winter, Clift, and Dutton (2004) in an exploratory study found batterers' score significantly lower than general population on all components of EQ-i. Additionally EQ-i total and sub-scales were related to score on propensity for abusiveness scale. Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, and Gottman, (1993) concluded that violent couples were more likely than non-distressed and happily married couples to engage in the husband demand/wife withdrawal pattern. Also husbands who had poor communication skills were more likely to be physically abusive toward their wives.

### *Role of EI in Couple & Family Therapy*

No doubt researches supporting the role of EI in marital quality have stirred up the couple and family therapists of the present time what Rogerian therapy has long ago introduced was nothing, but EI on the part of the therapist, and Virginia-Satire's empathic style and focus on getting family members to express their emotions clearly to one another is ought to be labeled as EI (Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, & Schindler, 1999). Review of the emotionally focused therapy has proved its effectiveness as compared to non emotion focused approach and no evidence of relapse is found. The key change in therapy occurs, when one partner risks being vulnerable expresses core needs and fears and the other supports positively (Johnson et al., 1999).

### *Scenario of Emotional Intelligence Research in Pakistan*

There are very few documented researches available examining the role of EI in different domains in Pakistan. Most of the researches in Pakistan have been done in the area of Organizational Psychology. For example, Nauman, Bhatti, Elahi, and Khalid (2006) studied the role of EI in the success of virtual project managers (VMPs). Latif (2004) studied the relationship of EI with change management. Anka (2006) concluded that motivation (human skill) is as much important as technical and conceptual skills are for successful managers. Malik (2005) studied the role of communication in interpersonal relations in organization.

Aslam (2004) found significant negative correlation between emotional intelligence and occupational stress among information technology professionals. Kiani (2003) found significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and different strategies of conflict resolution in organizations. In the field of education, Quaid and Farooq (2006) found significant difference in the emotional problems of high and low achievers. Asad, Masood, Khanum, and Naqvi (2004) studied the difference in emotional intelligence of medical and computer science students. Khan, Iqbal, Tariq and Zadeh (2006) in a study found significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and self esteem. Fatima (2005) reported significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being. Researchers have also explored the relationship of emotional intelligence with self efficacy, academic achievement, and self presentation (Ahmad, 2005; Akram, 2004; Zafar, 2005).

**Table 1**  
*Analysis of the Studies Reviewed in Percentages*

Nature of studies	Number	%
Total Studies Reviewed	24	-
Studies used self-report measures of EI (Trait model)	22	92%
Studies used performance measures of EI (ability model)	1	4%
Studies used both trait and ability measures	1	4%
Studies applied only Pearson's correlation analysis	13	54%
Studies applied Pearson's correlation and other analyses	15	62%
Synchronized studies	1	4%
Longitudinal studies	3	12%
Studies measured concurrent marital relationship	21	87%
Assortative mating for EI	0	0

**Table 2**  
*The Hierarchical Position of No. of Studies, Supporting Correlations of Components of EI and Marital Relationship*

Components	No
Emotional expressiveness/Communication	8
Optimism/pleasure	3
Empathy	2
Self awareness	2
Impulse control	1

## Conclusion

Review of researches done in west suggests moderate to high predictive strength of EI in relationship quality of married and dating couples. The studies however are of preliminary nature. Most of the studies are correlational in nature and used self-report measures of EI, which are easy to administer, but not as reliable as performance based ability measures and synchronized methods of study merging self-report and observational techniques. Initiative for longitudinal studies along with major studies measuring concurrent quality of marital relationship is very encouraging step in the field. Emotional communication/ expressiveness emerged as a key component of EI in most of the studies. Some other components of EI appeared to be of prime importance in marital relationship (e.g., optimism, empathy, emotional self awareness and impulse control), so it is important to work on these areas while dealing with unhealthy marriages. Different data analysis techniques have been applied. Role of demographic variables in marital adjustment is not supported by even a single study.

Review of emotional intelligence research in Pakistan illustrates that there is no single documented study available, which directly or indirectly explores the role of EI in marital relationship. Most of the researches in Pakistan have been conducted in organizational field. To explore the role of EI in marital relationship is a viable concept of study in Pakistan because the outlook of marital structure in Pakistan is quite different from Europe and America. Marriages in Pakistan are usually arranged by elders/parents and consent of persons to be married is given little or no importance, dating is not allowed before marriage, so two persons have no opportunity to understand each other before marriage. Some time couples are bound to live together for the sake of their families because a marriage in Pakistan is a contract between two families. In the presence of all these facts couples need some unique qualities to save their marriages and emotional intelligence may comprise the qualities, necessary to handle the sensitivity of couple's relationship. This is the time to investigate new variables and to come out of old conviction of contribution of demographic variables in the success and failure of marriages.

## Suggestions

Due to the newness of the concept of EI many questions are yet to be addressed. Exploratory work is needed in many important areas

of marriage. It is time for researchers to seek deeper understanding of the role of EI in marriage. In particular it is necessary:

1. To develop indigenous measures of EI and study the role of emotional intelligence in Pakistani perspective, as marital culture of Asian countries and Muslim societies is quite different from Western countries, so it is recommended to extend these results to Pakistani culture.
2. That experimental studies should be designed to see whether teaching EI skill changes EI level and results in positive influence on marital quality.
3. To build up longitudinal research plans that must investigate the role of EI in marital stability in future is recommended, as the review of researches shows that most of the studies had investigated the role EI in concurrent marital relationship.
4. To develop research plans that may study the relationship of EI and coping strategies (e.g., emotion focused or problem focused) used by distressed married couples while facing the stressors/challenges (e.g., accident of spouse, conflict with in-laws, loss of child etc).
5. To see how deficits in EI Influence parenting styles.

In the end apologies are extended to all, whose findings and opinions pertinent to this subject are not referenced due to limited space, unavailability of their work or inadvertent omission.

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