

Self-Silence and Life satisfaction among Females with Teenage Marriages: Is Rejection Sensitivity Mediate?

Sadaf Hafeez¹, Hina Ayaz², Aqsa Waseem

¹Assistant Professor Ziauddin University

²Assistant professor Institute of Clinical psychology, University of Karachi.

³School of Applied Psychology, Social Work and Policy, Universiti Utara Malaysia

Corresponding email: sadafchohan@gmail.com

Abstract

The present study aims to examine the relationship between self-silence and life satisfaction among females with teenage marriages. A correlational study was designed, and 127 young women with teenage marriages were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected from three main cities in Pakistan: Karachi, Lahore, and Faisalabad. Three different scales were used: The Silencing the Self Scale, Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire, and Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS-28. The correlation results indicated a negative correlation between self-silence and life satisfaction among females with teenage marriages. Furthermore, the study found that self-silence has a significant effect on rejection sensitivity and life satisfaction. Utilizing the Process Macro by Hayes, mediation analysis was conducted, revealing that rejection sensitivity significantly serves as a mediator between self-silence and life satisfaction among females with teenage marriages. In conclusion, this research suggests that when young women get married as teenagers and choose to keep quiet about their thoughts and feelings (self-silence), it is associated with heightened sensitivity to rejection and, consequently, lower life satisfaction.

Key words: Self-Silence, Sensitivity rejection, Life Satisfaction, Teenage marriages

Introduction

Globally, adolescence is universally recognized as a pivotal stage for girls, as the experiences during this period significantly influence their future. Early marriages are prevalent in societies worldwide, with South Asia being particularly noteworthy in this regard. Marriage signifies the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Ikamari, 2005; Palamuleni, 2011) and represents a significant life milestone. It serves as the legal underpinning for the formation of a family, establishing the sole recognized connection between males and females for procreation and meeting biological needs (Kamal et al., 2015; Mibang & Behera, 2006). Kamal et al. (2015) aptly characterize marriage as "a relationship between men and women that forms the fundamental unit of society," providing societal approval for sexual activity and childbearing.

Getting married can bring about significant and abrupt changes in the life of an adolescent girl, necessitating a sudden shift into adult roles and responsibilities for which she may not be developmentally prepared (Mathur et al., 2003). For many brides around the world, marriage also entails relocating to a new home and community, establishing fresh social connections that can intensify the mental health challenges associated with early marriage (Svanemyr et al., 2015). Additionally, child marriage restricts girls' access to resources by limiting their educational opportunities (Nguyen & Wodon, 2014; Svanemyr et al., 2015), leading to reduced availability of assets, resources, and social support networks. This limitation hampers the ability of married girls to make choices and assert agency in their lives (Singh, 1998).

In Pakistan, women face cultural disadvantages from the moment of birth, enduring gender-based discrimination throughout childhood, adolescence, and even after marriage (Nasrullah & Bhatti, 2012; Saleem et al., 2018). A significant concern in the country is early marriage, leading to numerous health issues for women, both physical and psychological. As of 2007, it was estimated that 50% of women aged 20 to 24 years had entered into marriage before reaching 18

years old (Nasrullah et al., 2014). The extent to which adolescent and young women, married before 18 years old (Jain & Kurz, 2007; UNICEF, 2005), experience spousal violence and reproductive health challenges at the hands of their husbands remains unknown in Pakistan. Marriage plays a direct role in the mental and physical well-being of women, especially when their life satisfaction is compromised, leading to long-term effects such as prolonged stress, self-silence, and depression (Cobb, 1976).

A longitudinal study suggests that the health and mental health benefits observed in married individuals, compared to unmarried or those delaying marriage, cannot be solely attributed to the selection of healthier individuals into marriage (Horwitz et al., 1996). Teenage marriage has been linked to profound psychological issues in females, making them more sensitive about their lives and less satisfied overall (Berkman & Syme, 1979). In Pakistan, 21% of girls are married before turning 18, and 3% are married before reaching 15 years old. According to UNICEF's 2018 data, Pakistan ranks sixth globally for the highest number of absolute child brides, with 1,909,000 reported cases. The practice of child marriage is fueled by gender inequality and the misguided belief that girls are somehow inferior to boys. Therefore this research aims to measure the relationship between self-silence and life satisfaction among females with teenage marriages; mediating role of rejection sensitivity.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction, as defined by Diener (1984), encompasses an individual's overall perspective and general evaluation of their life. Subjective perceptions of wealth, income, and health circumstances considerably influence life satisfaction, impacting how individuals perceive their own well-being (Uthso & Akter, 2022). Researchers argue that life satisfaction is influenced by non-material determinants such as health, socioeconomic-status, and social relationship (Hsu et al., 2017). Conversely, others propose that material factors like actual income, working status, and place of residence also play a role in determining life satisfaction (Dumludag, 2015). In societies with lower levels of female education, there tends to be reduced income and diminished bargaining and decision-making power, leading to lower life satisfaction among women. Additionally, the happiness and well-being of married individuals strongly correlate with life satisfaction (Selim, 2008). Veenhoven (1991) put forth the hypothesis that marital life has a more significant impact on the overall well-being of females. However, married women who exhibit higher levels of self-silence tend to report dissatisfaction in their relationships and overall dissatisfaction with life (Hondzel, 2007; Shouse, 2009).

Self-Silence

The concept of Self-Silence, first introduced by Jack in 1991, is rooted in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982) and self-in-relation theory (Gilligan, 1993; Jack, 1991). It posits that individuals whose self-concept is closely interwoven with their relationships and who partake in self-sacrificial actions are especially prone to experiencing depression. Individuals practicing self-silencing deliberately stifle their individual voice and perspectives to maintain intimate relationships, resulting in a gradual erosion of their authentic self within the relational context. To foster closeness, these individuals end up presenting a contrived version of themselves, undermining the potential for a genuine connection. The internal conflict between expressing the false self versus the true self contributes to the onset of depression. When applied to intimate relationships, especially romantic ones, self-silencing can potentially have adverse effects on individuals striving to sustain the relationship.

In many intimate relationships, individuals grapple with the tension between staying true to themselves and conforming to the expected role within the partnership. This struggle often leads

people to suppress their feelings in an attempt to salvage the relationship and avoid additional conflicts. Paradoxically, the act of self-silencing can yield undesirable outcomes; individuals may find themselves dissatisfied within the relationship and experience depression due to an inability to express genuine emotions (Inman & London, 2022; Iordachescu et al., 2021). Since the groundbreaking research conducted by Jack and Dill in 1992, extensive studies have delved into the connection of self-silencing with various personal and relational dynamics. Numerous investigations have established correlations between self-silencing and eating pathologies (Wechsler et al., 2006), poor adjustment (Haemmerlie et al., 2001), rejection sensitivity, reduced relationship satisfaction, and depressive symptomatology (Harper et al., 2006; Harper & Welsch, 2007). Furthermore, self-silencing has been linked to self-criticism and loneliness (Besser et al., 2002), further emphasizing its negative association with life satisfaction (Hondzel, 2007).

Rejection Sensitivity as Mediator

Rejection sensitivity refers to the inclination to anticipate, predict, and excessively react to potential social rejection in situations that may be explicit or ambiguous (Beeson et al., 2020). Individuals with higher rejection sensitivity tend to exhibit more intense emotional responses to real or perceived rejection, leading to persistent maladaptive behavior (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2016; Downey & Feldman, 1996). While rejection sensitivity shares similarities with social anxiety disorder, which involves anxious expectations related to potential rejection (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Park, 2007), the distinction lies in the fact that rejection sensitivity encompasses both the expectation and perception of rejection, coupled with strong emotional reactions to perceived rejection. In contrast, social anxiety revolves around intense fear, anxiety, or avoidance of social situations where one might be judged by others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Experiencing rejection from significant others and valued social groups profoundly influences individuals' emotions and behavior (Williams, 2001). One well-documented consequence of rejection is an upsurge in hostility and reactive aggression towards others, and many females tend to adopt self-silence as a response to rejection in romantic relationships or unsatisfying life situations (Feldman & Downey, 1994).

Previous meta-analyses have explored the connections between RS and various theoretical outcomes. A comprehensive meta-analysis of 75 studies conducted by Gao et al. (2017) revealed a positive association between rejection sensitivity and mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, borderline personality disorder, body dysmorphic disorder, and loneliness. Additionally, Chow et al. (2008) found that rejection sensitivity is positively correlated with loneliness and negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Existing literature presents evidence of a positive link between rejection sensitivity and self-silence (Harper et al., 2006). This is supported by the fact that individuals with higher rejection sensitivity and self-silence tend to report more depressive symptoms, ultimately leading to a sense of life dissatisfaction (Chang et al., 2023).

Previous studies have explored rejection sensitivity as a mediator in various relationships, including between experienced rejection and borderline characteristics (Rosenbach & Renneberg, 2014), family violence and attachment behavior (Feldman & Downey, 1994), borderline personality and social support (Zielinski & Veilleux, 2014), and social exclusion and depression (Niu et al., 2023).but less evidence are available for RS mediator between self-silence and life satisfaction among females with teenage marriages in Pakistan. In line with literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated for current research:

H₁ There would be a negative association between self-silence and life satisfaction among females with teenage marriage

H₂ Rejection sensitivity would be a mediator between self-silence and life satisfaction among females with teenage marriage

Methods

Participants

This is a correlational study and purposive sampling were used for data collection. A sample comprised 127 young girls with teenage marriage having age range from 18 to 21, and the minimum marriage duration was 3 years. Data were collected from both urban and rural residences in three main cities of Pakistan: Karachi, Lahore, and Faisalabad. The minimum education of participants was intermediate. For teenage marriage, marriage below 18 years were considered as teenage/child marriage according to Singh and Revollo (2016) and Nasrullah et al. (2014) operationalization of teenage marriage.

Measures

Demographics Sheet: The demographic sheet was obtained from respondents along with these demographic; age, age during marriage, love marriage or arrange marriage, family system (joint/nuclear), residence (rural/urban) and city (Karachi, Lahore and Faisalabad). The Table 1 represents the results of demographic variables.

Table 1

Demographic Variables (N=127)

Variables		<i>f</i> %	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Age of Participants			21.70(0.790)
Age During Marriage			16.53 (1.42)
Duration of Marriage			5.17 (1.43)
Marriage Type	Love Marriage	23 (18.1)	
	Arrange Marriage	104 (81.9)	
Family status	Joint	86 (67.7)	
	Separate	41 (32.3)	
Residence	Rural	78 (61.4)	
	Urban	49 (38.6)	
City	Faisalabad	38 (29.9)	
	Lahore	42 (33.1)	
	Karachi	47 (37.0)	

The Silencing the Self Scale: This measure, comprising 31 items, assesses individuals' endorsement of self-silencing ideas and behaviors by expressing beliefs and actions within partnerships. It yields five scores: four subscale scores and a comprehensive score referred to as Global Self-silencing. The subscales encompass the following, along with illustrative items: Divided Self: ("While I may appear happy outwardly, I feel angry and rebellious") Externalized Self-perception: ("I tend to evaluate myself based on how I perceive others see me"), Silencing the Self: ("I believe it is preferable to keep my feelings to myself when they conflict with my partner's"). These subscales contribute to a holistic understanding of an individual's orientation towards self-silencing within relational contexts. Participants indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point scale, where 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree" and 5 corresponds to "strongly agree. In the results section below, the psychometric properties of the measure are detailed. The first factor; Care as Self-Sacrifice (9 items), consists of items; 7, 8, 9,

10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15, and 30, the second factor; Silencing the Self (9 items), comprises items 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24. The third factor, Divided Self (7 items), is composed of items; 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, and 31. The fourth factor; Externalized Self-perception (6 items); comprises items; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 (Jack, 1991).

Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ): The RSQ initially developed by Downey and Feldman (1996), was employed to assess the levels of rejection sensitivity. Comprising 18 items, such as "You ask someone you don't know well out on a date," the questionnaire presents hypothetical interpersonal scenarios where respondents make requests of significant individuals, including parents, teachers, friends, or romantic partners. Participants are tasked with indicating their agreement level with each item on a 6-point scale, where 1 signifies "very unconcerned" to 6 denoting "very concerned" or 1 indicating "very unlikely" to 6 indicating "very likely." Internal consistency (alpha) was 0.81 (Downey & Feldman, 1996), which support sufficient reliability.

Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale: The 6-item Riverside Life Satisfaction scale, developed by Margolis et al. in 2019, was employed to assess individuals' perceived levels of life satisfaction. Respondents utilized a 7-point Likert scale to rate their opinions, where 1 denoted "strongly disagree" and 7 represented "strongly agree." According to Margolis et al. (2019), Cronbach's alpha coefficients during the pretest and posttest phases were 0.78 and 0.83, respectively.

Procedure

This study aimed to explore the mediating role of rejection sensitivity and life satisfaction among females who entered into teenage marriages. Permission was secured from the original authors of the instruments employed in the study. The sample consisted of 127 females with teenage marriages. Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling, and they were assured that their participation was voluntary, with their consent obtained before data collection. No coercion was employed to ensure the completion of the questionnaires. The study rigorously upheld the confidentiality of participant information throughout the entire research process.

Data Analysis

In line with the research hypotheses, diverse statistical tests were applied through SPSS 28.0. The reliability of all questionnaires was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. The normality of the data was affirmed, supported by satisfactory skewness results. Following this, bivariate correlation analysis was employed to scrutinize the relationships between self-silence and life satisfaction for Hypothesis 1. Mediation was tested on Model 4 using Process Macro by Hayes (Igartua & Hayes, 2021).

Results

The correlation results presented in Table 2 indicate significant positive associations of self-silence with care as self-sacrifice ($r = .83, p < .01$), silencing the self ($r = .78, p < .01$), divided self ($r = .76, p < .01$), externalized self-perception ($r = .81, p < .01$), and rejection sensitivity ($r = .55, p < .01$). Conversely, self-silence demonstrates a significant negative correlation with life satisfaction ($r = -.52, p < .01$). Similarly, care as self-sacrifice exhibits positive significant associations with silencing the self ($r = .73, p < .01$), divided self ($r = .69, p < .01$), externalized self-perception ($r = .75, p < .01$), and rejection sensitivity ($r = .41, p < .01$). However, care as self-sacrifice demonstrates a significant negative correlation with life satisfaction ($r = -.46, p < .01$). In addition, silencing the self reveals positive significant associations with divided self ($r =$

.72, $p < .01$), externalized self-perception ($r = .67$, $p < .01$), and rejection sensitivity ($r = .45$, $p < .01$). Silencing the self revealed a significant negative correlation with life satisfaction ($r = -.54$, $p < .01$). Conversely, divided self confirmed a positive significant association with externalized self-perception ($r = .74$, $p < .01$), rejection sensitivity ($r = .50$, $p < .01$), and a significant negative correlation with life satisfaction ($r = -.42$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, externalized self-perception demonstrated a positive significant association with rejection sensitivity ($r = .39$, $p < .01$) and a significant negative correlation with life satisfaction ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$). Ultimately, rejection sensitivity exhibited a significant negative correlation with life satisfaction ($r = -.43$, $p < .01$).

Table 2

Correlation among variables ($N=127$)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Self-Silence	-	.83**	.78**	.76**	.81**	.55**	-.52**
2. Care As Self-Sacrifice		-	.73**	.69**	.75**	.41**	-.46**
3. Silencing The Self			-	.72**	.67**	.45**	-.54**
4. Divided Self				-	.74**	.50**	-.42**
5. Externalized Self-Perception					-	.39**	-.25**
6. Rejection Sensitivity						-	-.43**
7. Life Satisfaction							-
Mean	103.76	29.35	27.14	21.08	18.29	62.92	23.94
SD	12.38	5.81	6.21	4.17	3.48	15.28	4.76
Cronbach alpha	.83	.77	.79	.76	.83	.88	.86

** $p < .01$

The results from Table 4.2 showed that self-silence revealed significant direct predictor ($B = -0.79$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.29$, $F = 51.79$) and indirect predictor with gratitude ($B = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.32$, $F = 28.72$) of life satisfaction among females with teenage marriages. However, self-silence also found significant predictor of rejection sensitivity ($B = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.30$, $F = 53.57$) and rejection sensitivity was also confirmed a significant predictor of life satisfaction ($B = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$). So the results support that rejection sensitivity found significant mediator between self-silence and life satisfaction among females with teenage marriages.

Table 3

Predictors	Life Satisfaction		
	Model 1 B	B	Model 2 95% CI
Constant	91.59**	95.82**	[87.47, 104.17]
Self-Silence	-.79**	.62**	[-.93, -.32]
Rejection Sensitivity		.38*	[.16, -.02]
R^2	.29	.32	
F	51.79**	28.72**	
ΔR^2		.30	
ΔF		53.57**	

Rejection Sensitivity mediator between Self-Silence and Life Satisfaction ($N=127$)

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; B for standardized regression coefficient; CI for Confidence interval

Discussion

This research aims to measure the relationship between self-silence and life satisfaction among females with teenage marriages; mediating role of rejection sensitivity. The findings of this study for H₁ revealed that self-silence, including its subscales like care as self-sacrifice, silencing the self, divided self, and externalized self-perception, is significantly linked to lower life satisfaction among females with teenage marriages. Past research by Jack (1991) initially suggested that self-silencing contributes to depression in women, but later studies contradicted this by showing that both men and women engage in self-silencing behaviors to maintain relationships, sometimes this leads to dissatisfaction with life (Abrams et al., 2019; Granski et al., 2020). Numerous studies have emphasized the negative impact of self-silencing on mental health and overall life satisfaction (Emran et al., 2020; Kurtiş, 2010; Pintea & Gatea, 2021). When individuals consistently suppress their true selves, avoiding expressing their needs or opinions, it can result in emotions like frustration, resentment, and a sense of being overlooked or invalidated. Over time, these factors may contribute to a decline in overall life satisfaction. The results align with previous research, indicating that in Pakistani society, especially among young women, self-silencing manifests as sacrificing for family, obeying elders, and avoiding disrespect to maintain relationships. This tendency to suppress negative emotions may lead to low self-esteem, frustration, and ultimately depressive symptoms (Ahmed & Iqbal, 2019). Therefore, the inverse relationship between self-silence and life satisfaction, as supported by both the present research and previous studies, confirms the acceptance of this hypothesis.

The findings of this study support Hypothesis 2 (H₂), indicating that self-silence has a significant direct and indirect impact on life satisfaction among females with teenage marriages. Similarly, self-silence exhibits a significant direct effect on rejection sensitivity in this demographic, suggesting that rejection sensitivity plays a mediating role between self-silence and life satisfaction. Prior research aligned with our current findings has established a significant positive connection between self-silence and rejection sensitivity (Freitag et al., 2022; Inman & London, 2022). Additionally, earlier investigations have unveiled associations between self-silencing and various aspects of relationship functioning and satisfaction, particularly in younger populations. For instance, a study involving adolescent couples revealed that those reporting higher levels of self-silencing also experienced poorer communication. Furthermore, girls indicating higher self-silencing reported lower satisfaction in their relationships (Harper & Welsh, 2007). Similarly, individuals characterized by high rejection sensitivity (RS) may be more prone to tolerating hostile or aggressive behavior from a partner in an effort to avoid rejection, potentially heightening their vulnerability to experiencing intimate partner violence. Consequently, rejection sensitivity is likely to exhibit a negative association with life satisfaction. Previous research has recognized rejection sensitivity as a mediator in various relationship dynamics, including the link between experienced rejection and borderline characteristics (Rosenbach & Renneberg, 2014), family violence and attachment behavior (Feldman & Downey, 1994), borderline personality and social support (Zielinski & Veilleux, 2014), and social exclusion and depression (Niu et al., 2023). These earlier findings lend support to the outcomes of the present research. Therefore this hypothesis is accepted.

Conclusion

This study found that when young women get married as teenagers, keeping quiet about their own thoughts and feelings (self-silence) is connected to feeling more sensitive to rejection. This means that if they tend to hold back and not express themselves, they are more likely to be affected by feelings of rejection. On the other hand, if they're more open about their thoughts and feelings, they tend to be more satisfied with their lives. The study further revealed that females

with teenage marriages who experience rejection sensitivity, defined as being easily hurt by the potential for rejection, tend to have lower life satisfaction. Furthermore, the study revealed that both self-silence and rejection sensitivity are important factors in predicting how satisfied these young married women feel with their lives. Essentially, if they tend to keep quiet and are sensitive to rejection, it's likely to impact their overall life satisfaction. Interestingly, the research suggests that rejection sensitivity plays a significant role as a mediator between self-silence and life satisfaction. In other words, when these young women keep quiet, it tends to make them more sensitive to rejection, and this, in turn, affects how satisfied they are with their lives.

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