FACTORS AFFECTING COUPLES' INTERACTIONS DURING COVID-19 IN SRI LANKA

Thesara Jayawardane
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

Vathsala Wickramasinghe
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

Abstract

COVID-19 has made a substantial and irreversible impact on almost all areas of countries around the world and Sri Lanka is no exception. With the restrictions vested upon public as a result of COVID-19 disease, more and more couples claim to have a decrease in their relationship happiness and interaction. Further research in this would ensure to reduce the damage the pandemic would have on couples. Hence, the objectives of this study were to investigate motivational factors affecting couples' interactions, to investigate stress factors affecting couples' interactions, to investigate the level of couples' interactions, to investigate resources available for spouses and to analyse whether resource availability, moderates the relationship between motivational factors/stressors and the level of couples' interactions. Data was collected from over 300 participants of a convenience sample using an online survey. The couples were adults of 25 years or older, residing in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. Statistical analysis was performed to identify moderator effect of resource availability on the level of couples' interactions. In conclusion the study emphasised that motivational factors such as family approval and social prestige and stressors such as financial strain and occupational status contribute towards the interaction of couples and they are moderated by resources available to these couples such as cultural beliefs and availability of family support respectively. The study concludes with recommendations of ways to overcome the issues brought upon by COVID-19 on couples' interaction.

Keywords: Interaction of Spouses; Motivation Factors; Stressors; Covid-19; Sri Lanka.

1. Introduction

COVID-19 or the Corona Virus disease has become one of the most dangerous pandemics in the century causing a vast amount of deaths globally. Many countries are fighting the disease with active vaccine programs and, Sri Lanka has been named as one of the most efficient countries in fighting COVID-19 with the efficient vaccination program. Even with the lengthy lockdown periods enforced by the Sri Lankan government, the virus has become more dangerous with evolving variants of the COVID-19 being discovered regularly.

The impact the pandemic and the lockdown has brought upon couples cannot be ignored as the disruption of daily activities and the isolation at home causes many couples to interact differently to their normal behaviors. At the beginning of the pandemic all parties were concerned mainly of battling the disease and reducing death rates where no consideration was given for harmony at home fronts or couple interactions.

With couples being isolated for lengthy periods of times due to the lockdowns and working from home arrangements, the daily interactions start requiring further attention. It is indeed important to understand the factors that motivate positive interactions between couples and the negative stressors which repudiate their interactions in order to understand the level of interaction and their mental well-being. According to Pietromonac and Overall (2020, p.3) "external stressors related to the pandemic will likely increase interpersonal conflict within relationships, the extent of which may be moderated by pre-existing relationship quality and satisfaction; characteristics; and vulnerabilities". Many couples depend upon each other for mental support during the pandemic as mortalities and financial difficulties are caused by COVID-19. Many stressors such as uncertainties, occupational threats, duties arising from external family members and children would create a negative impact on the level couples interact with each other. Similarly having community and family approval with social prestige and cultural beliefs would motivate couples to interact positively with each other. Thus, the aim of this research is to investigate the factors that motivate and cause stressors for the level of interaction among Sri Lankan couples during the COVID-19 lockdown. With the intention of investigating that, the below objectives were derived.

2. Objectives

- To investigate motivational factors affecting couples' interactions.
- To investigate stress factors affecting couples' interactions.
- To investigate the level of couples' interactions.
- To investigate resources available for spouses.
- To analyze whether resource availability, moderates the relationship between motivational factors/stressors and the level of couples' interactions.

This article draws from relevant literature across similar topics to identify how the motivational factors and stress factors affect couples' interactions, the various resources available for these spouses and the way these recourses moderate the interaction between the couples. The conceptual framework was created based up on models of various human behavior and methods these families would function.

3. Literature Review
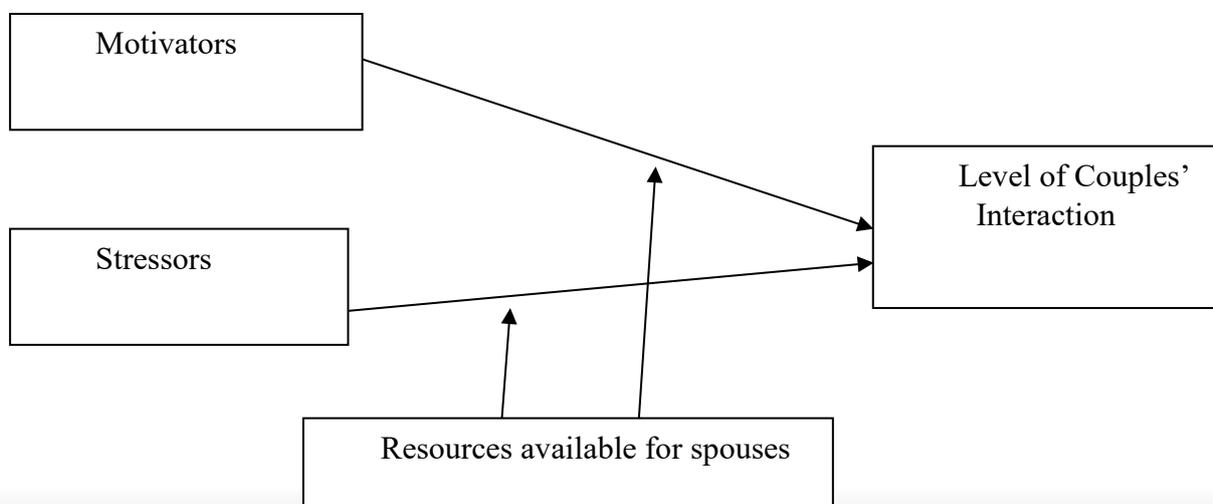
3.1 Level of Couples' Interaction

With the objective of determining the factors that affect the interactions of couples, this literature review will inspect previous studies that have been conducted on this area. Couples interaction determines the success of their marriage and the satisfaction in the relationship. Khalatbari et.al (2013) identifies marital satisfaction found through couple's interaction as a key factor in determining the assessing happiness and stability in a successful marriage". Zainah et.al (2012) speaks of how the interaction of couples can be beneficial and detrimental to the success of a marriage. Farahmand et al (2014) points out that the level of interaction between couples contribute to the quality of their relationship. Copen et. al. (2012) mentions that to keep a stable marriage and a solid relationship couples must identify factors that bring significant marital satisfaction when they interact. Many studies have conducted on marriage satisfaction on couples but, the effect of Covid-19 has on the level of interaction among couples have not been identified, especially for Asian or Sri Lankan couples.

Covid-19 has made a significant impact on all couples irrespective of their geographical where about and, the level they interact will determine the satisfaction and future of their relationship. During a crisis environment such as the current pandemic, conflicts among couples will be inevitable. Many researchers have agreed that couples with harmonious interaction between each other demonstrate marital success. (Ellison, Burdette, Wilcox, & 2010; Mahoney, 2010). Thus, couples' interactions should bring a meaning of life to cultivate matrimonial harmony (Mohammad, 2010).

In the following sections variables of motivational factors, stress factors and resources available for spouses are reviewed in relation to the interaction of couples and propose our hypotheses of the study.

The conceptual model developed for the study is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 − Conceptual model

3.2 Motivational Factors

Billingsley et al. (2005, p. 7), identified nine themes "love, sex, relationship permanence, compatibility in personality, common interests, decision-making, intimacy, communication, and religion" that are motivators of couples' interaction which brings marital satisfaction. According to Hawkins (1968, p.2) "marital satisfaction is a sense of happiness, satisfaction, and joy experienced by the husband or wife when they consider all aspects of their marriage".

Kamaly et. al. (2014) states that couples' interaction is motivated by physical and psychological requirements and, properly motivated interaction will lead to satisfactory relationships. Rahmani (2011) states that factors such as interpersonal, psychological, interaction, spiritual-religious, and sexual factors also motivate couples' interaction.

According to Zainah et. al (2012) a key motivational factor on couples' interaction can be seen as demographic factor which includes couple's education, age of marriage age, age gap between the couple, length of marriage. Zanjani et.al (2014) adds more to this list with factors such as the economic situation of the couple, employability of the couple and the number of children.

When the age is considered it was identified by Yazdanpanah et.al (2015) that older the couple is, the more motivated they are to interact with each other compared to younger couples who resented the isolation and social distancing. Sayadpour (2005) has also pointed out how having a good income, possessing a good education and satisfied employment can motivate couples to interact more positively. Karimi et.al. (2010) brings out the importance of having good interpersonal connections and understanding among couples. Maghsoodi et. Al (2011) tallies it with psychological attributes such as forgiveness and support for each other which he claims as motivators for couples' interactions.

Pourmarzi et.al (2013) further reiterates how motivational factors affect couples' interactions and identifies them as good listening skills, better conflict resolving abilities and proper discussion methods. Abbaszadeh et.al. (2011) has proved that having common religious beliefs and cultural factors motivate couples' interactions more. Negligence in sexual desires has caused many rifts among couples' interactions and according to Sahabi et. al. (2012) having a good sexual relationship is a positive motivational factor for couples' interaction.4

Based on the above reviewed literature, it is hypothesized:

H1: *Motivational Factors influence couples' interaction*.

3.3 Stress Factors

Cohan et al., (2009, p.514) states that "During a flu outbreak, about 10–30% of the general public reported major fears of contracting the disease". It is a well-known fact that COVID-19 has brought numerous stressors on couples' interaction which has a negative effect on their relationships. American Psychological Association (2020) has done a recent study on the stressors caused by COVID-19 pandemic and they claim that "many individuals in the United States are experiencing heightened levels of stress as a result of the pandemic". Such stressors seem to affect the interaction of couples all around the world. "COVID-19 type of pandemic related stressors on couples makes it hard to know which impacts may

be time limited and which will be longer term" (Karney et al., 2005, p.27). According to Neff & Karney (2004, p. 143) "external stressors can spill over to affect the quality of couples' interactions and perceptions of the relationship and partner". In these environments' partners may feel isolated in their relationship with the minimal interaction taking place between them. One of the key stress factors many couples faced with COVID-19 pandemic was the fear of your loved ones getting infected or worse, their death. Another cause for the stress among couples was the uncertainty of the end of the pandemic. A study by De Sousa et al., (2013) has found that couples showed low interaction when there is gender preference in children expressed by either of the spouses. Many couples claimed it to cause stress and also claimed to interact less when alcohol abuse exists in the household which again was a stress causing factor. According to Khezri et al., (2020) lack of support from partners act as a stressor which negates the interaction between couples especially during the lockdown period of COVID-19. It is certainly worthwhile to identify the stressors that affect the interaction of couples during the COVID-19 to identify how they would react in a similar scenario in future compared to how they normally interact.

Based on the above reviewed literature, it is hypothesized:

H2*: Stress factors influences couples' interactions*.

3.4 Resources available for spouses

Government lockdowns which took place as a COVID-19 control measure brought no choice for couples but to stay at home for lengthy periods of time. Most daily routines were disrupted and everyone except essential workers had to work from home. If a family member is diagnosed with the COVID-19, the situation became stressful with strict medical, quarantine and health guidelines to follow. This was a significant disruption to the daily routine of families all around the world. Doom & Cicchetti, (2018, p.1446) states that "the extent to which this severe adversity will impact couples will largely depend on other related factors in their lives". These other related factors can be identified as various resources that are available for the couples when they are interacting during the COVID-19. Some resources may motivate their interaction while other resources would increase stress factors.

A significant resource that motivates couples' interaction during COVID-19 can be identified as cultural beliefs the couple hold. With the isolation taking place with COVID-19 lockdown many couples have given more importance to their cultural beliefs and made time for interaction with each other as a couple and a family. The religious and cultural values have contributed to this motivation for these couples to interact more. Fraenkel & Cho (2020, p.859) states that "it has also provided a chance for families to reconsider the ratio of togetherness and autonomy going forward". Sri Lankan culture encourages couples to always stand by each other through sickness and health. This cultural belief extends to all the relatives of the other spouse too. With the COVID-19 infections and the threat of death couples are more and more motivated to interact with each other to resolve these health and social issues arising. With the new normal way of living COVID-19 pandemic has brought, many families have the children studying at home using online methods while parents work from home. The new routines have created more interaction among couples and the cultural beliefs of supporting the children and spouse plays a major role in motivating these interactions. Fraenkel (2019) points out the importance of cultural values

couples hold which motivates the level of their interaction, especially during a time like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Walsh (2009) has mentioned how the cultural values held by a person may affect the interaction of their spouse positively.

Based on the above reviewed literature, it is hypothesized:

H3*: Resources available for spouses moderates the relationship between motivational factors and the couples' interactions.*

Many couples find that one of the reasons that influence stressors in their interactions can be seen as the family support they receive. Lockdowns taking place in the country with travel sanctions within districts cause close relatives to stay away from couples. As a result, the normal support that was extended may not be provided. Working from home while taking care of the children would be an added burden for most couples and family support would have been an excellent resource to cope with this. Lack of such support would certainly increase the stress and as a result mitigate the interactions between the couple.

In a research done on Asian couples by Ho (1987) identified that one of the main causes of stress among couples was having unnecessary influence from relatives. Even though the extended family considered it as offering support, the couples claimed it as a stress factor which, influence their own interaction and harmony. Thus, not having family support may also negate the stressors for some couples during COVID-19. In most Asian countries including Sri Lanka women are employed and frequently child care is provided by the extended family, especially the mother-in-law (Freedman et al., 1994). The conflicts with regards to the upbringing of children between the extended family and couples cause stress which leads to their distance from each other (Chien, 1996). Hence the unavailability of such family supports and minding the child bearing by the couple themselves might reduce the stress factor and encourage more interaction among couples during COVID-19 lockdown.

Based on the above reviewed literature, it is hypothesised:

H4*: Resources available for spouses moderates the relationship between stress factors and the couples' interactions.*

With the above literature review, it can be seen that the resources available for couples that affect their interactions on motivational factors and stressors during COVID-19 includes family resources and cultural beliefs.

4. Method

As per the discussion done above many motivational factors and stress factors affect the couples' interaction during COVID-19 pandemic and, resources such as cultural beliefs and family support play a significant role in affecting those factors.

4.1 Measures

To measure the Motivational factors which affect couples' interaction, a 03-item measure was used, which can be seen in Appendix 1. These measures were taken using the questionnaire by Deguglielmo (1973), named 'The Inventory of Marital Adjustment: The Development of An Instrument for Measuring Financial Adjustment, Style of Life and Interpersonal Relationships'. These items were on a five-point Likert scale ranging from always (1) to never (5).

To measure the Stress factors which affect couples' interaction, 09-item measure was used, which is shown in Appendix 2. Five (05) of these measures were taken using the questionnaire by Hansen (1978), named 'Marital adjustment, idealization, and conventionalization'. Four (04) of the measures were from a questionnaire created by the author. These items are on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from always-agree (4) to disagree frequently (1).

To measure the Resources available for spouses, 11-item measure was used, which are shown in Appendix 3. These measures were taken using the questionnaire by Deguglielmo (1973), named 'The Development of an Instrument for Measuring Financial Adjustment'. These items were on a five-point Likert scale ranging from always (1) to never (5).

To measure the level of interaction of couples, 14-item measure was used, which are shown in Appendix 4. These measures were taken using the questionnaire by Haynes (1992), named 'The Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire for Older Persons, Psychological Assessment'. These items were on a five-point Likert scale ranging from always (1) to never (5).

4.2 Population and sample

The total population of Sri Lanka is 21.41 million people and out of which 43% falls in to the ages 25-54 years old and 54-60 years old of the population is 6% (worldpopulationreview.com 14/08/21). Taking that into account the total number of 25-60 years old in Sri Lanka is 10 million. The total population in the Western Province is 1.9 million and the total 25-60 years old adds up to 959,131. Obtaining a 95% confidence level with only a 5% chance of the sample results differing from the true population average, confidence interval of the margin of error is calculated by $1/\sqrt{N}$. Here N is considered as the number of participants or sample size (Niles, 2006). Therefore, the survey done with 300 participants justifies the total population of the study.

4.3 Participants

The 301 participants were adult males and females of age 25-60 residing in the Western Province. The participants took 26 minutes on average to finish the survey questionnaire. English, which is one of the national languages of Sri Lanka, was used in the survey questionnaire. Initial introduction was given to the respondents and an in-depth explanation was followed prior to them taking the survey. All respondent participated voluntarily and their identity was kept anonymous.

4.4 Method of data collection

The duration of the survey collection was 12th March to 12th June 2021. This was a period Sri Lankan government had imposed a partial lockdown. During this period travel restrictions were in place and majority worked form home. Schools and Universities were fully closed and children of all ages were restricted to home. Questionnaire was uploaded on google forms and the 25-60-year-old adult respondents were identified. Their consent was obtained from an initial email and the link to the google form was shared afterwards.

4.5 Method of data analysis

Validity and reliability of the measures were evaluated. Principal component factor analysis was conducted using SPSS software. Factor analysis yielded one factor each for motivators and stressors. Factor analysis yielded two factors for resources available for spouses; these were named as cultural beliefs and family resources. Factor analysis yielded one factor for couples' interactions. The fit measures were given in Table 1. Results of these factor analysis were shown in Appendix 1 to 4. Moderation analysis was conducted using PROCESS program developed by Hayes (2013). Indirect effects were assessed based on 5,000 bootstrapped samples using bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the size and significance of the effects.

Table 1 − Fit measures

	Cronbach's alpha	Explained variation	Eigenvalue	AVE	Construct reliability
Motivators	.869	79.317	2.379	.793	.920
Stressors	.958	74.735	6.726	.748	.964
Couples' interactions	.973	77.299	9.276	.773	.976
Resources available for spouses:	.931	77.921	-	-	-
Family resources	.947	47.619	6.563	2.008	.946
Cultural pressure	.914	30.303	.714	.749	.923

5. Results

Since resources available for spouses yielded two factors, we analyzed four separate models. The results of these models are as follows.

Results relating to motivators and couples' interactions moderated by family resources are shown in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, the effect of motivators (IV) on couples' interactions is not significant (p > .05). The effect of family resources (M) on couples' interactions is significant (B = -.7997, p < .001). The effect of interaction on couples' level of interactions is also significant (B = .1573, p < .01). Relationships between motivators (IV) and couples' interactions are significant for all low (b = .2752, p < .05), average (b = .3815, p < .001), and high (b = .4879, p < .001) values of family resources (M). Overall,
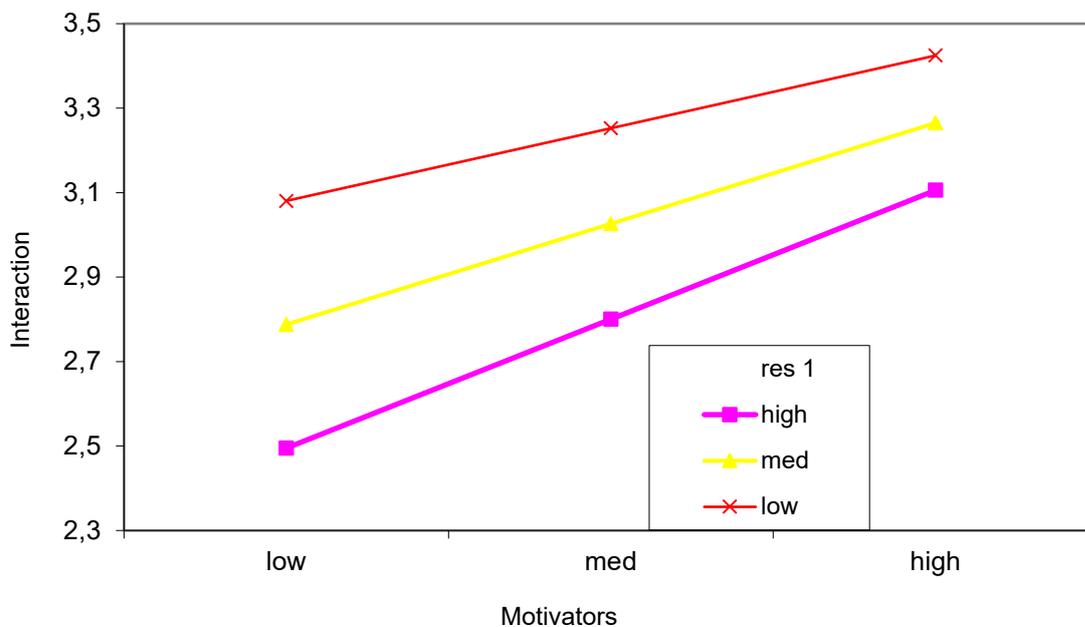
family resources (M) moderates the relationship between motivators (IV) and couples' interactions. Figure 2 shows this relationship figuratively.

Table 2 − Motivators and couples' interactions moderated by family resources

	Couple's interactions (DV) B(SE)		
Motivators (IV)	-.0821 (.2036)		
Family resources (M)	-.7997 (.1749)***		
Interaction (IVxM)	.1573 (.0511)**		
R^2	.0785		
F (df1, df2)	8.4051 (3,295)***		
ΔR^2	.0295		
ΔF(df1, df2)	9.4803 (1,295)**		
Conditional effects:			
	-SD	Mean	+SD
Family resources (M)	2.2714	2.9479	3.6244
Effect (*t*)	.2752 (2.2097)*	.3815 (3.3493)***	.4879 (4.3064)***

Notes: Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported; standard errors = SE. Bootstrap sample size = 5000. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Figure 2 − Moderation Graph- motivators and couples' interactions moderated by family resources

Analysis showed that motivators and couples' interactions are not moderated by culture pressure. Further, the results showed that stressors and couples' interactions are not moderated by family resources. Results relating to stressors and couples' interactions
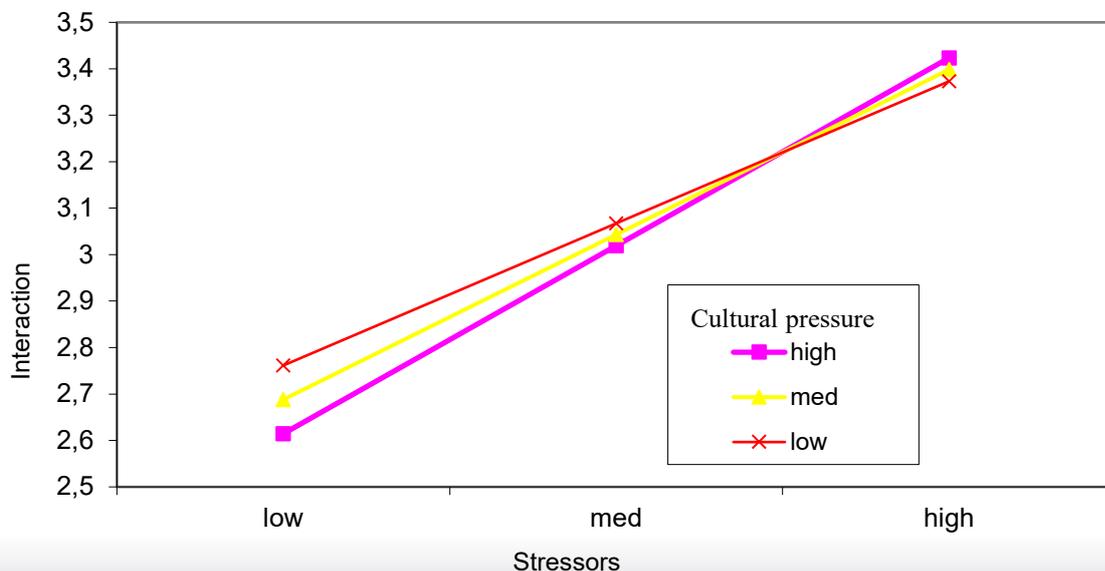
moderated by culture pressure are shown in Table 3. As shown in Table 3, the effect of Stressors (IV) on couples' interactions is not significant ($p > .05$). The effect of culture pressure (M) on couples' interactions is significant (B = -.4129, $p < .05$). The effect of interaction on couples' level of interactions is also significant (B = .1202, $p < .05$). Relationships between Stressors (IV) and couples' interactions are significant for all low ($b = .4823$, $p < .001$), average ($b = .5600$, $p < .001$), and high ($b = .6378$, $p < .001$) values of culture pressure (M). Overall, culture pressure (M) moderates the relationship between stressors (IV) and couples' interactions. Figure 3 shows this relationship figuratively.

Table 3 − Stressors and couples' interactions moderated by culture pressure

	Couples' Interactions (DV) B(SE)		
Stressors (IV)	.1852 (.1793)		
Culture pressure (M)	-.4129 (.1805)*		
Interaction (IVxM)	.1202 (.0486)*		
R^2	.2490		
F (df1, df2)	32.7061 (3, 295)***		
ΔR^2	.0155		
ΔF(df1, df2)	6.1050 (1, 295)*		
Conditional effects:			
	-SD	Mean	+SD
Culture pressure (M)	2.4717	3.1186	3.7655
Effect (*t*)	.4823 (5.0442)***	.5600 (6.3033)***	.6378 (6.8669)***

Notes: Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported; standard errors = SE. Bootstrap sample size = 5000. *$p < .05$, ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Figure 3 − Moderation Graph- stressors and couples' interactions moderated by culture pressure

6. Discussion of Results

This research examined how motivational factors and stressors affect couples' interaction during the lockdown periods which took place in Sri Lanka due to COVID-19 pandemic. The results observed how the resources available for couples such as family support and their cultural beliefs moderated the interaction. The findings of the research and these results will be a valuable addition to the literature on future pandemic studies. According to a study on Rahmani et.al (2011) motivational factors which influenced couples' interaction included their personality factors such as understanding of each other and maturity, economic factors as well as compatibility factors such as love and sexual fulfilment. In the current research it was reaffirmed when the couples agreed that the factors which motivate their interaction included demographic factors, personal factors, psychological factors and sexual factors. In this research it was identified that demographic factors is an important influencer in motivating couples interaction. A study done by Wagheiy et.al (2009) on couples reaffirms this in a similar manner. The findings of this study reaffirm a study of Abbaszadeh et.al (2008) where it is identified how couples are motivated to interact with each other when factors such as communication and intimacy are present.

A study done by Holt-Lunstad et al. (2020) identifies the stressors which cause a rift in couples' interaction. Sterle et.al. (2018) has also identified how stressors can affect couples' interaction. The findings of this research also identified such stressors which limit couples' interaction which includes uncertainty, fear of your loved ones getting infected and not knowing the end result of the pandemic.

The research reaffirmed the findings of Mikulincer & Shaver (2007) and Pietromonaco & Overall (2020) which prove that cultural beliefs held by couples motivate their interaction and strengthen it during pandemic scenarios. The research found how the cultural beliefs motivated the couples' interaction and the similar findings were seen in a study done by Mortazavi et.al (2014). According to that study the cultural beliefs included the belief of forgiving and forgetting, understanding each other and attachment held for the societal recognition. This was similar to the factors expressed by the research participants. A study done by Wilson (2011) identified how couples' interaction level depends up on support factors extended by the cultural beliefs. Another study by Ritu et.al (2012) affirmed that cultural support as well as, family support plays two major roles in couples' interaction.

A large portion of the participants confirmed that not having family support caused stressors in their interaction during COVID-19. The findings of Bodenmann (2005) and Falconier et al. (2015) reaffirms that couples with larger family support systems are more comfortable in coping with stressful situations. A similar study done by Balzarini et al., (2020) on stressors during COVID-19 illness verifies that stressors increase with the lack of family support. In this research it was established that family support will play a huge role in minimizing stressors and if not available it increases the stressors. Thus, this research outcome affirms that the motivational factors and stressors which affect a couples' interaction are moderated by cultural beliefs and family support.

7. Conclusion

COVID-19 has added unforgettable memories and experiences which will be remembered throughout the lifetime of everyone who went through the pandemic. Apart from the global

crisis it brought up on economies and many industries the impact caused on couples or marital spouses is certainly not insignificant. The research was conducted on married couples in Sri Lanka who were locked down for periods of time due to government regulations during COVID-19 outbreak. The main objectives of the research include investigating motivational factors and stress factors affecting a couples interactions, investigating the resources available for spouses and analyzing whether such resources such as cultural beliefs and family support, would moderate the relationship between motivational factors/stressors and the level of couples' interactions. A conceptual model was developed and variables such as motivational factors, stressors and resources available for spouses were reviewed in relation to the couples' interaction.

The data found in the research further identified that factors such as education, age of marriage, length of marriage, economic situation, employability, number of children, good income, good listening skills, better conflict resolving abilities and good sexual relationship act as motivational factors in the level of couples' interaction. Similarly, stressors such as fear of your loved ones getting infected or their death, uncertainty of the end of the pandemic, lack of support from partner also play a role in affecting the level of couples' interaction during COVID-19. They were further affirmed in comparison to the literature review.

With the analysis of literature review it was identified that the resources available for couples' interaction that affect their motivational factors and stressors during COVID-19 includes cultural beliefs and family support. Four hypotheses were established which were H1: Motivational Factors influence the couples' interaction, H2: Stress factors influences the couples' interactions, H3: Resources available for spouses moderates the relationship between motivational factors and the couples' interactions and H4: Resources available for spouses moderates the relationship between stress factors and the couples' interactions.

The data collection was conducted by an online survey from over 300 participants. The questionnaire collected data from adults of the age 25 – 60 residing in the Western Province. Factor analysis yielded one factor each for motivators and stressors. Factor analysis yielded two factors for resources available for spouses; these were named as cultural beliefs and family resources. Factor analysis yielded one factor for couples' interactions. Results relating to the motivational factors and couples' interaction moderated by cultural beliefs conclude that cultural belies moderates, the relationship between motivational factors and level of couples' interaction. Results relating to the stressors and couples' interaction moderated by family support conclude that support extended by families moderate, the relationship between stress factors and level of couples' interaction.

COVID-19 has brought various unknowns to the lives of people. Identifying the issues faced by marital couples during the pandemic and understanding factors that influence their level of interaction during an extreme scenario like the pandemic would most certainly be beneficial for studies on couples and their behaviors as well as for making recommendations for future.

8. Recommendations

This study recommends that future research focuses on policy decisions which affect couples that can be implemented or amended during extensive lockdown periods. Policies which restrict families being together and hold them apart for lengthy periods of time

should have more empathetic considerations. Travel restrictions imposed by locally and internationally halt, interactions between couples who live apart. The effects of relationships and couples' interactions should be given due consideration by future policy makers.

Many interactions of couples require actual presence of the other person and not simple virtual interactions. As the study identified, having extended family support affects the stressors of couples' interaction. Thus, modes of communication must be found for families to extend their support for these couples. Couples' who are older and geographically isolated require more such family support in order to engage with their interactions.

This study has outlined how COVID-19 has impacted couples' interactions and the motivational factors and stressors that contribute to it. Many areas of Sri Lanka including the economy, education and health sector has suffered a significant damage due to the pandemic but identifying the impact on relationships and behaviors of couples may assist in future rectifications. This can be seen as an opportunity to educate couples on behaviors to adopt and habits to refrain from, if and when a similar crisis takes place.

This study makes the following recommendations to couples with regards to couples' interaction during COVID-19.

- Make yourself a priority. Before taking care of your spouse and children one must ensure the safety, health and well-being of ones' self. This includes physical as well as mental wellness.
- Arrange an individual working space. Even if both are working, couples must try to find their own working area at home which is not disturbed with noises and other distractions.
- Make plans for the household chores. Divide and share the work between the couple.
- Be grateful for what you have and appreciate each other and the things you are blessed with.
- Be cheerful and happy. Encourage and practice humor and compassion with each other.
- Communicate effectively. Whether it is an issue or a simple chore, good interaction includes clear communication without having to guess what other person thinks.
- Keep in touch with the rest of the world. Isolation physically should not stop from being in touch virtually with friends and families which will encourage remaining sociable.
- Minimize social media. Being virtually connected to the world should have limits and being addicted to social media platforms or games should be avoided.
- Find together time. Even during watching television or listening to radio, make time for couple interaction. Daily allocate a time for the talking and fun.
- Maintain a routine. Even during lockdown, the time to wake up and going to bed should be consistent and following a routine time table will ease daily duties and chores.
- Make future plans. Giving priority to the family and relationship and discussing about the future will encourage better interaction.
- Start new hobbies. Finding time to allocate for personal growth and leisure activities would benefit couples.

– Schedule house maintenance. Gardening, painting, repairing the house together will be an excellent way for couples to unite during lockdown.

9. Limitations and Future Research

As in all researches this study has its' limitations too. The participants were mainly females even if the researches tried to obtain equal participation. Language was another limitation as the survey was limited to adults who are versatile in English with online facility. This survey was carried out during a partial lockdown period. Thus, many took part in the survey while eagerly waiting for the country to open up. Also the sample can be seen limited in representing every married couple in Sri Lanka.

Therefore, future research can be conducted with a larger and diverse sample. The same sample and findings can be used for a Qualitative research as well. Future researchers are encouraged to identify the policies that affected the couples in their interactions due to COVID-19. More studies can be done to find the ways the couples overcame the stressors and how they increased their motivational factors to assist in their interactions.

References

1. Abbaszadeh M, Behi M, Darbandi M, Yousefi M. and Jamlzadeh F. (2008), Criteria of spouse selection in the boy or girl students in Zabol universsity of medical sciences, *Rostamineh*, 2(3):80–8.
2. Balzarini, R. N., Muise, A., Zoppolat, G., Di Bartolomeo, A., Rodrigues, D. L., Alonso-Ferres, M. and Slatcher, R. B. (2020), *Love in the Time of Covid: Perceived Partner Responsiveness Buffers People from Lower Relationship Quality Associated with Covid-Related Stressors*, May 16, 2020, https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/e3fh4.
3. Billingsley, S., Mee-Gaik Lim, Caron, J., Harris, A., and Canada, R. (2005), Historical overview of criteria for marital and family success. *Family Therapy: The Journal of the California Graduate School of Family Psychology*, 32(1), 1-14. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.stthomas.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?directt rue & dbsih&AN18437835&siteehost-live.
4. Bodenmann, G. (2005), Dyadic Coping and its Significance for Marital Functioning. In T. A. Revenson, K. Kayser, & G. Bodenmann (Eds.), *Couples coping with stress: Emerging perspectives on dyadic coping* (pp. 33–49). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/11031-002.
5. Chien, C.A. (1996) *Marriage and the Fami*ly. Taipei, Taiwan: National Open University Press (in Chinese).
6. Cohan, C. L., and Cole, S. (2002), Life course transitions and natural disaster: Marriage, birth,and divorce following Hurricane Hugo. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 16, 14–25.
7. Copen CE, Daniels K, Vespa J. and Mosher W.D. (2012), *First marriages in the United States: data from the 2006–2010 National Survey of Family Growth*. Natl Health Stat Report.21:1.
8. De Sousa, A., Mahajan PT, Pimple P, Palsetia D. and Dave N. (2013), Indian religious concepts on sexuality and marriage. *Indian J Psychiatry*, 55(Suppl 2):S256-S262. doi:10.4103/0019-5545.105547.
9. Doom, J.R., and Cicchetti, D. (2018), *The Developmental Psychopathology of Stress Exposure in Childhood*.

10. Ellison, C. G., Burdette, A. M., and Wilcox, W. B. (2010), The couple that prays together: Race and ethnicity, religion, and relationship quality among working-age adults. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(4), 963–975. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00742.xEric L.

11. Falconier, Mariana & Jackson, Jeffrey & Hilpert, Peter and Bodenmann, Guy. (2015), Dyadic Coping and Relationship Satisfaction: A Meta-Analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*. 42. 28-46. 10.1016/j.cpr.2015.07.002.

12. Farahmand Z. and Ahmadnia S.H. (2014), A gender study on the relationship between the ways (traditional and modern) of mate selection and marital satisfaction of families in shiraz city. *Iran social sciences studies*, 11(42):91–105.

13. Fraenkel, P. (2019), Love in action: An integrative approach to last chance couple therapy, *Family Process*, 58, 569-594.

14. Fraenkel, P. and Cho, W. L. (2020), Reaching up, down, in, and around: Couple and family coping during the Corona virus pandemic, *Family Process*, 10.1111/famp.12570.

15. Freedman, R., Thornton, A. and Yang, L.S. (1994), Determinants of coresidence in extended households A. Thornton H.S. Lin (Eds) *Social change and the family in Taiwan.* The University of Chicago Press Chicago 335–358.

16. Hawkins, J. L. (1968), Associations between companionship, hostility, and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 30(4), 647–650. https://doi.org/10.2307/349510.

17. Ho, M.K. (1987), *Family therapy with ethnic minorities*, London: Sage, 285pp.

18. Holt-Lunstad J., Birmingham W. and Jones B. (2008), Is there something unique about marriage? the relative impact of marital status, relationship quality, and network social support on ambulatory blood pressure and mental health. *Ann Behav Med*, 35:239–44.

19. Kamaly A, Dehghani S. and Ghasemi H. (2014), Meta-analysis of effectiveness of psychological interventions – counseling on enhancing marital satisfaction (Iran: 2002_2012). *Counseling and Psychotherapy Culture*, 5(19):95–122.

20. Karimi S, Kazemi M, Hasankhani H. and Kazemi S. (2011), Comparison of the demographic charactristics of couples requested divorce and normal couples in Sirjan during, *Journal of nursing midwifery*, 4(3–4):42–9.

21. Karney, B. R., Story, L. B. and Bradbury, T. N. (2005), Marriages in Context: Interactions Between Chronic and Acute Stress Among Newlyweds. In T. A. Revenson, K. Kayser, & G. Bodenmann (Eds.), *Couples coping with stress: Emerging perspectives on dyadic coping* (pp. 13–32). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/11031-001,

22. Khalatbari J, Ghorbanshiroudi Sh, Niaz Azari K, Bazleh N. and Safaryazdi N. (2013), The Relationship between Marital Satisfaction (Based on Religious Criteria) and Emotional Stability. *Procedia Soc: Behavioural Sci* 84:869-73.

23. Khezri, Z., Hassan, S. A., and Nordin, M. H. M. (2020). Factors Affecting Marital Satisfaction and Marital Communication Among Marital Women: Literature of Review. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 10(16), 220–236.

24. Mahoney, A. (2010), Religion in families, 1999-2009: A relational spirituality framework. Journal of Marriage and Family, 72(4), 805-827.

25. Maghsoodi S, Moidfar S. and Tavakol M.(2011), Sociological study between social capital and marital satisfaction among couples in Kerman. *Iran social studies*, 5(1):124–52.

26. Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007), *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics, and change*, The Guilford Press.

27. Mohammed D., Zaheri F, Shariati M, Simbar M, Ebadi A. and Azghadi S.B.(2016), Effective Factors in Marital Satisfaction in Perspective of Iranian Women and Men: A systematic review, *Electron Physician*. 8(12):3369-3377. Published 2016 Dec 25. doi:10.19082/3369

28. Mortazavi M, Bakhshayesh A, Fatehizadeh M. and Emaminiya S. (2014), The relationship between sexual frigity and marital conflict in women residing in Yazd. *The Journal of Urmia University of Medical Sciences*, 24(11):931–21.

29. Neff, L. A. and Karney, B. R. (2004), How does context affect intimate relationships? Linking external stress and cognitive processes within marriage. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 30(2), 134–148. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167203255984.

30. Pietromonaco, P. R. and Overall, N. C. (2021), Applying relationship science to evaluate how the COVID-19 pandemic may impact couples' relationships. *American Psychologist*, 76(3), 438–450. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000714.

31. Pietromonaco, P. R. and Collins, N. L. (2017), Interpersonal mechanisms linking close relationships to health. *American Psychologist*, 72(6), 531–542. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000129.

32. Pourmarzi D, Rimaz S. and Merghati K.E. (2013), Educational needs for mental health promotion in engaged youth. *SJSPH*, 10(3):1–14.

33. Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, (2011), Seventh Edition.

34. Rahmani A, Merghati khoei E, Sadeghi N. and Allahgholi L. (2011), Relationship between Sexual pleasure and Marital Satisfaction, *IJN*, 24(70):82–90.

35. Ritu, N., Kate, N., Grover, S., Khehra, N. and Basu, D. (2012). Does the Excessive use of Mobile Phones in Young Adults Reflect an Emerging Behavioral Addiction? *Journal of Postgraduate Medicine Education and Research*. 46. 177-182. 10.5005/jp-journals-10028-1040.

36. Sahabi J, Khani S. and Khani A. (2012), Marriage Patterns and its Relationship with Martial Satisfaction, (A Study on Married Students at Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj Branch). *Sociological Studies of Youth Journal*, 4(12):77–112.

37. Sayadpour Z. (2005), Successful marriage: study of marital satisfaction in student. *Ravanshensi Tahavoli*, 1(2):1–14. doi: 10.18869/acadpub.jnms.1.3.62.

38. Sterle, M. F., Fontaine, J., De Mol, J. and Verhofstadt, L. L. (2018), Expatriate Family Adjustment: An Overview of Empirical Evidence on Challenges and Resources. *Frontiers in psychology*, 9, 1207. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01207.

39. Wagheiy Y, Miri MR and Ghasemipour M. (2009), A survey about effective factors on the marital satisfaction in employees of two Birjand Universities. *Birjand Medical Sciences of University Journal*;16(4):43–50.

40. Walsh,J, Spangaro,J. and Soldatic,K, (2015),Global understandings of domestic violence, Nursing and Health Sciences Journal Special Issue: *Women's Health*, Volume: 17, Issue 1:1-4.

41. Wilson, C. (2011), *The expatriate spouse; A study of their adjustment to expatriate life*, Master Thesis, Massey University, New Zealand.

42. World Health Organisation, (2021), *COVID-19 Statistics 2020-2021*, www.covid19.who.int.

43. World Population Review, (2021), *Statistics of Sri Lanka*, https://worldpopulationreview.com.

44. Yazdanpanah F, Khalili M. and Keshtkaran Z. (2015), Level of marital satisfaction in couples living in Iran. *Indian journal of research*, 4(4):4–7.

45. Zainah AZ, Nasir R, Hashim R. S. and Yusof N, (2012), Effects of Demographic Variables on Marital Satisfaction. *Asian Social Science*, 8(9):46–9. doi: 10.5539/ass. v8n9p46.

46. Zanjani H.A. and Baghaitesfahani Z. (2014), The effect of employment and family life, on female teachers' satisfaction (A Case Study of Teachers' in Karaj) *Journal of Specialized Social Science*, 10(39):13–39.