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## The Level of Marital Distress Among Emirati Families from the Couples' Viewpoints

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### **Abstract**

*The current research aims at identifying the level of marital distress among Emirati families from the couples' viewpoints. The analytical-descriptive method was adopted in the current research. The research community consisted of (151,314) families, whereas the study sample consisted of (680) married couples, who were randomly selected by cluster sampling. The research results concluded that the level of marital distress among Emirati families, from the married couples' viewpoints, was moderate. They also concluded that the family upbringing pattern had a negative relationship with marital distress.*

**Keywords:** *marital distress, Emirati families, couples.*

### **Introduction**

Marriage is one of the basic social establishments and systems, which is the legitimate method to establish a social institution, i.e., the family. Family is the basis on which societies are built. Marriage is founded on love, affection, and strong, solid connections that strive to assure the survival and continuity of the family and enable it to realize its own ambitions and goals, away from the causes that lead to distress, disintegration, and disagreements. (Tariq & Zeib, 2023)

Family ties may experience conflicts, which are common in life. A successful marriage is not free of ups and downs, but rather it overcomes difficulties and uses disputes as material to test their ability to address problems and train the husband and wife to overcome these difficulties (Mas'udah, 2022). This requires great efforts from both husband and wife to choose appropriate methods to address these problems in a timely manner before marital interaction gets spoiled or leads to separation or divorce (Amani, et.al, 2018).

Al-Balawi (2019) dealt with the role conflict between couples. Each of them wants to be the key player in the family and have control over it. She also dealt with the inability to assume family responsibility, whether the husband or wife, to form a family and raise children in light of the changes that could transfer the family from one state to a less financial and economical state during the era of technology and globalization. She also dealt with how marital duties and rights are neglected by one of the parties, whether the husband or wife. (Baris, 2022)

Al-Azmi and Al-Zayoud (2019) show that each marriage may face crises in which marital distress deepens, the relationship between the couples becomes tense, their lives become disturbed and their affairs and agreements become difficult. Marriage requires efforts, patience, and a desire on their part to resolve the crisis, and needs a family support and friends support as well until the crisis period passes peacefully.

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(Nwatu, 2020) believes that if the individual is unable to overcome this marital distress in an acceptable way, then he will be exposed to a kind of disagreement similar to that he experienced before. He would experience an unsuccessful marriage resulting from poor health, personal, social, and professional compatibility. Affection and compassion between the couples are required, because life is full of influences that may cause problems varying in the couples' ability to confront them.

(Vaez & Juhari, 2017) demonstrate that marital distress is a kind of pressure that negatively affects marital satisfaction due to the conflict between the couples, which obstructs the basic function of the family. Marital distress is characterized by emotional disturbances and conflicts, and it is full of ups and downs facing married couples and low levels of satisfaction (Carlson & Dermer, 2017; Indriastuti et al., 2022)

(Saeidi, et.al, 2019) focus on the reasons leading to marital distress. One of these reasons is represented by family interference in marital life and the couple's privacy, whether by the husband's or wife's family. Another reason is the husband's or wife's attachment to their families in terms of housing or decisions that concern their lives. This kind of attachment leads to exacerbating the problems between couples. The inequality between couples at the social, cultural, educational, moral, religious, or age levels is another cause of marital distress.

(Jackson, et.al, 2023) suggest that marital distress is linked to a collection of disruptions that impact the pattern, structure, or social tradition that are linked to social change. On the other hand, they negatively affect social control within society. (Adam, et.al, 2022; Ha et al., 2023) stress that marital distress expresses the tension that occurs in social relations in society or the social system, which leads to the destruction or collapse of the system that affects social controls.

## **The research problem and questions**

Marital distress is one of the most common social problems that leads to the deterioration and disintegration of families. The resulting negative effects of this distress affect the family structure and prevent it from performing its key roles within society. Based on the researcher's observation, several families are more inclined to evade responsibility and be indifferent and reckless in solving problems, which disturbs their peace and hinders their progress in life. As a result, marital disputes and tension replace peace and compassion and are negatively reflected in the couple's behavior and actions. Marital distress is one of the factors that lead to numerous marital problems, which generates a state of dissatisfaction with one or both of the parties in the marital relationship and results in several negative feelings. This study addresses a critical phenomenon that is becoming increasingly widespread in the UAE. This is clearly demonstrated by the increasing number of divorce cases at the community level, where there were (596) divorce cases in 2022. Therefore, the current paper aims to detect the level of marital distress in Emirati families from the couples' point of view. Therefore, this paper seeks to answer the following question:

What is the level of marital distress in Emirati families from the couples' point of view?

## **The research importance**

The significance of the current study lies in the significance of the topic that it addressed, which is represented by marital distress as a threat to marital relations in Emirati society from the couples' viewpoints. This research enriches theoretical knowledge in the field of marital distress as a threat to marital relations, which is an important phenomenon whose spread is increasing in the United Arab Emirates. This becomes evident through the increase in divorce cases at the community level, where the results of this study can be used to develop treatment programs for couples who do not appear consciously aware of the marital distress they face by using non-adaptive strategies.

## **The terms of study**

This study includes some basic terms, which are defined procedurally and conceptually as follows:

**Marital relations:** It is an interactive, material, and moral connection between husband and wife, which whereby feelings, emotions, behaviors and opinions are exchanged. It is the foundation on which the family and society are built. The strength of this connection reflects the success of Emirati families (Al-Tuwaijri and Al-Otaibi, 2022).

**Marital distress** is a state of incompatibility and tension between couples that lasts for a long time, leading to the emergence of conflicts arising from unsatisfied needs, which leads to turmoil in the marital relationship (Al-Anazi, 2021).

## **Previous Studies**

Al-Tuwaijri, Ghada, and Al-Otaibi (2022) made a study that revealed the key factors contributing to marital distress between couples. It aimed to reveal the most important factors leading to marital distress between couples, namely, personal factors, social factors, and economic factors in the emergence of marital distress between couples. A non-probability sample of (430) respondents was selected by using the snowball method. The study arrived at key results: the personal factors leading to marital distress (communication and interaction between the couples, the intimate relationship between the couples, self-affirmation and emotional stability) ranked first, followed by the social factors leading to (social closeness between the couples, the social roles of the couples, relationships within families). The economic aspects of the couples came in last place (financial planning for families, the woman's participation in spending with her husband, joint property between the couples).

Wahba (2021) carried out a study which aimed to identify the association between marital distress and causal attribution in the light of certain demographic variables among a sample of couples. It also aimed at identifying the possibility of predicting marital distress in a sample of couples through causal attribution. The researcher adopted the descriptive correlational method to realize the aims of the research. The study sample consisted of (355) husbands and wives, (159) males and (196) females. The study arrived at key results, namely, there is a positive correlation with statistical significance among the degrees of couples on the marital distress scale and their scores on each of the causal attribution scale. There is also statistically significant differences in the average scores of couples on marital distress according to the gender variable (male or female) in favor of males. The result revealed that there were differences in marital distress in the age variable for the younger age group. Furthermore, the results also revealed that there was a possibility of predicting marital distress through causal attribution in a sample of couples.

A study by (Saeidi, et.al, 2019) aimed to determine the association between aggression, marital distress, and depression. The study sample consisted of (212) males and females. The results of the study showed that there was a positive and statistically significant correlation among aggression, marital distress, and depression. The results showed that marital distress and aggression were predictive factors for depression.

(Halldorsson, et.al, 2018) conducted a study to uncover the association between marital distress and depression. The study sample consisted of (40) wives divided into two groups: one group had marital distress and the other had not. The results indicated that there were no depressive symptoms in the sample that did not suffer from marital distress, whereas the group having marital distress had high depressive symptoms.

(Vaez & Juhari, 2017) aimed to reveal the association between marital distress and marital satisfaction from the perspective of the vulnerability, stress, and adjustment model. The research sample consisted of (462) Middle Eastern students in Malaysia. The results revealed that there was a significant correlation

among high stress and marital dissatisfaction among couples. The results showed that marital distress was the toughest pressure that negatively affected respondents' marital satisfaction.

### **The role of the current study compared to previous studies**

Many previous studies dealt with the concept of marital distress as a threat to marital relations, where the current research has benefited from those studies by adopting the method, procedures, tool, and interpreting the results. The current research is distinct from previous studies in terms of sample, as it was chosen from the Emirati community. It is also distinguished by the type of independent variables, as it coped with the variables of the economic situation of the family and the number of its members. As far as the researcher knows, these two variables have not met together in any other study. The marital distress scale with its different dimensions will be used on a sample of couples in the UAE. This research has come up with several important recommendations.

### **The Research Methodology**

The descriptive method was adopted in this research.

#### **The research community**

The research community consisted of (151,314) Emirati families. (Federal Center for Competitiveness and Statistics, 2022). The research sample was randomly selected by cluster sampling, due to the size of the research community, and the huge spacing among families. (750) questionnaires were distributed to heads of households (husband and wife) within the targeted statistical community by the researcher herself and with the help of a group consisting of 6 female students, who have sufficient experience to carry out survey studies. After conducting the application process, (697) questionnaires were retrieved after applying them to heads of households. After conducting a review of the retrieved questionnaires, it was found that (17) of them were incomplete for the required data and were neglected in the statistical analysis. Thus, the total number of questionnaires subject to analysis was (680), which was a suitable sample for the purposes of fulfilling the aims of this research. Due to the large size of the research community, its spatial spacing, and the difficulty of providing the logistical capabilities available, the researcher could not choose a larger sample of the statistical community.

**Table 1:** The demographic and functional characteristics of the study sample

Percentage	No	Class	Variables
%20.9	142	less than 30	Age/ year
%36.9	251	31-40	
%28.5	194	41-50	
%13.7	93	over 50	
%10	68	secondary or less	Educational level
%33.2	226	Intermediate diploma	
%51.5	350	Bachelor's	
%5.3	36	Postgraduate	
%13.1	89	Public sector employee	Work nature
%25.6	174	private sector employee	
%56	381	Freelance	
%5.3	36	Retired, jobless	
%24.4	166	3 persons or less	Number of family members (persons)
%60.4	411	4- Less than 7 members	
%13.1	89	7- Less than 10 individuals	
%2.1	14	10 and over	

Table No. (1) illustrates that the age group (31-40 years) was first with (36.9%). (51.5%) were B.A. holders, and (56%) of the study sample were freelancers, whereas (60.4%) of the respondents have (7-less than 10 members).

## The research tools

### The scale of marital distress

This part includes paragraphs covering the dependent variable of the study (The scale of marital distress), whose number of paragraphs was (30), namely (aggression between couples), represented by paragraphs (59-65), weak emotional communication, represented by paragraphs (66-72), and financial disagreements, represented by paragraphs (73-79), disputes pertaining to the methods of raising children, represented by paragraphs (80-86), the method of discussing and solving problems, represented by paragraphs (87-93). The paragraphs of this variable were developed by referring to the standards designed by each of (Safouh, 2022; Donato, et.al, 2014; Langat & Njenga, 2015; Kaddour, 2013).

The answers were classified based on the five-point Likert scale, where five answers were identified (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). The responses were scored from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). Accordingly, if the value of the arithmetic mean for the paragraphs is greater than (3.68-5), then the level of perceptions will be high, but if the value of the arithmetic mean ranges between (2.34-3.67), then the level of perceptions will be moderate. If the arithmetic mean is less than (2.33), then the level of perceptions will be low, depending on the criterion of the upper limit - the lower limit.

The maximum value of the response score - the minimum value of the response score

The number of levels (average)

$$=1.33 = \frac{4}{3} = \frac{1-5}{3}$$

From 1 + 1.33= to 2.33 or less (weak)

From 2.34 + 1.33 = to 3.67 (medium)

3.68+ to 5 = (high)

### Implications of the Validity of the Scale

Face validity of the scale: The face validity of the scale was verified in its initial form, which was (36 items) by presenting it to (5) arbitrators who are specialists in UAE universities. They were required to provide feedback on the paragraphs of the scale concerning the linguistic wording, meaning, and the appropriateness of paragraphs to the dimension it belongs to. Based on the arbitrators' comments, the recommended amendments were made, on which they unanimously agreed. The most prominent amendments were: deleting the communication and interaction dimension because it is a repetition of what is included in the communication scale between couples. Many paragraphs were reformulated and adjusted in terms of language, in addition to deleting (6) paragraphs. Thus, the scale after taking the arbitrator's comments consisted of (30) items, measuring marital distress as a whole between the couples. It should be noted that most of the arbitrators agreed on the validity of the scale, the clarity and suitability of its items, as the agreement rate was (80%), which was a high percentage of agreement.

### Indexes of construction validity

The values of the correlation coefficients of the degree on the paragraph with the total score on the marital distress scale were calculated as an index of the construction validity of the scale. The values of the correlation coefficients of the degree on the paragraph with the total score on the marital distress

scale ranged between (0.69-0.83), as they were statistically significant at the significance level (0.05). This is evidence of the validity of the marital distress scale and the homogeneity of its paragraphs. This means that there is great consistency between what the paragraph measures and what the scale measures in general.

### Indications of the stability of the scale

The stability of the internal consistency of lifestyles was estimated by employing the Cronbach Alpha equation on the data of the first application of the exploratory sample, consisting of (20) husbands and wives, as its value for the scale as a whole was (0.891). Retest reliability (retest) was conducted for the purposes of verifying the retest reliability of the lifestyle scale and its dimensions. The aforementioned survey sample was re-applied by using the Test-Retest method, with an interval of two weeks between the first and second applications, as it was calculated by using the Pearson correlation coefficient between the two applications on the survey sample. Its value for the scale was (0.88), while for the dimensions, it ranged between (0.81-0.90).

## Presentation and Discussion of the Results

What is the level of marital distress among Emirati families from the couples' point of view?

**Table 2:** The arithmetic means and standard deviations of the responses of the study sample on the level of marital distress among Emirati families from the point of view of the couples.

Degree of agreement	Rank	Standard deviation	Arithmetic mean	Determinant	No
Medium	3	0.96	3.61	Conflicts related to methods of raising children	1
Medium	5	1.02	3.51	Aggression between couples	2
Medium	2	0.93	3.63	Poor emotional communication	3
Medium	4	0.99	3.59	Methods of discussion and problem solving	4
Medium	1	0.91	3.65	Financial disputes	5
Medium	-	0.53	3.60	Marital distress	5-1

It is obvious from Table (2) that the overall arithmetic mean of the response of the sample members regarding the level of marital distress in Emirati families from the viewpoint of the couples was (3.60), with a standard deviation of (0.53). The determinant (financial disputes) had an arithmetic mean of (3.65) and a standard deviation of (0.91), and the determinant (poor emotional communication) had an arithmetic mean of (3.63) and a standard deviation of (0.93). The determinant (conflicts related to methods of raising children) had an arithmetic mean of (3.61) and a standard deviation of (0.96). The fourth rank was the determinant (methods of discussing and solving problems), with an arithmetic mean of (3.59) and a standard deviation of (0.99), whereas the last rank was the determinant (aggression between couples), with an arithmetic mean of (3.51) and a standard deviation of (1.02).

This indicates that social reality proves that marital distress in the Emirati family has spread in recent times. The contemporary reality is witnessing an unprecedented state of marital distress, whether in terms of change in its manifestations and social levels or in terms of its causes and factors influencing it. Not only this, but its risks and negative repercussions that threaten family stability have expanded, because marital life is essentially linked to biological and cultural needs imposed by the necessities of its

continuity. Therefore, since the early stages of human development, marriage has allowed the regulation of marital needs and the formation of the family in order to create a balance and normality of family life within the framework of a large society. In addition, marriage provided the necessity for cooperation and joint action imposed by the mechanisms and elements of the prevailing production pattern.

With the development of forms and patterns of marriage, and as a result of patriarchal authority and control and men's dominance over wealth, their dominion over the family increased. They have the right to benefit from this dominance in order to change the system of succession in favor of children and to transfer socio-economic ownership to the man (husband). The husband became the sole owner of a family that he initially chose to be associated with and later had the right to separate from it with cultural justifications that were influenced by the elements of marriage itself.

This indicates that couples go through a set of circumstances that obstruct their marital life, which may lead to high levels of stress on both parties, causing a kind of marital distress between them. Marital distress is part of the marital relationship and it develops due to a group of situations that both parties go through, where they face difficulty dealing with the dispute that arises between them.

## Recommendations

According to the results, the research recommends the following:

1. The results revealed that the level of marital distress was moderate. This requires the support of Emirati families to confront marital distress among their parties. The study recommends providing family education programs in schools and universities and for young people about to get married, in addition to spreading and activating family counseling offices for married couples.
2. It is urgent to activate the role of the media and social media and hold specialized seminars by specialists and family establishments to concentrate on the phenomenon of marital distress, and to develop plans and strategies aimed at reducing marital distress among couples and addressing it.
3. Working with the couples and enlightening them on their motives and underlying causes in order to understand the nature of their problems and gain the ability to solve their various conflicts.
4. Further scientific studies on the topic of this study in non-Emirati environments should be conducted, as there were no studies that directly linked these variables in the non-Emirati environment and their scarcity in foreign environments.

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