

Educational Continuation, Social Support and Mental Well-being among Married and Unmarried Women

Maham Fayyaz ^a Nuzhat Shaheen ^b Hifza Imran ^c Laiba Jamil ^d

Abstract: Marriage plays a vital role in the choice and continuation of education. Women with higher education and strong social support tend to exhibit higher levels of mental well-being. The present study aimed to explore the relationship between social support and mental well-being among married and unmarried women. It also examined how marital status influences educational continuation, highlighting how married and unmarried women may change their preferences regarding education, which in turn affects their mental well-being. A sample of N = 200 women aged 16 to 50 was used in this study, consisting of n = 37 married and n = 163 unmarried women. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet (1990), and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWB) developed by Carol D. Ryff (1995), were used to assess social support and psychological well-being. The survey method was employed using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. The results showed a positive relationship between social support and mental well-being among both married and unmarried women. According to the regression analysis, social support accounted for 13% of the variance in psychological well-being, indicating that social support is a significant predictor. Additionally, women who received strong social support from their families demonstrated better mental well-being compared to those with lower levels. It is recommended that the government implement policies to ensure women's access to education.

Keywords: Education Continuation, Social Support, Mental Wellbeing

Introduction

Education continuation is a necessary process for competing in the modern era (König et al., 2020). Women should be empowered and confident, regardless of whether they are married or unmarried (Putra et al., 2021). Education contributes significantly to the mental well-being of women (Hill & King, 1993), and social support from both family and society plays a crucial role in helping women pursue education (Boykin, 2023). As per Aristotle's concept, many people still believe that women are incapable of studying and that their minds are too weak to bear the burden of knowledge. This belief persists particularly in tribal areas. In several provinces and specific communities in Pakistan, families restrict their daughters from receiving an education due to outdated traditions (Akhter & Akber, 2016).

Previous studies have shown that promoting women's education in Asian countries, especially Pakistan, remains a challenge. One study reveals that continuing education is somewhat difficult for girls, as parents often prioritize marriage and dowry over their daughters' schooling. Many parents do not hesitate to stop their daughters' education to arrange their marriage, and some girls are not even allowed to continue after completing school (Imran, 2023). Another barrier to women's education is religious misinterpretation. In some communities, fatwas are issued against women's education, and some individuals wrongly consider it sinful for women to study (Bradley & Saigol, 2016). Pakistani studies

^a PhD Scholar, Riphah Institute of Clinical and Professional Psychology, Riphah International University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, Punjab, Pakistan.

^b Clinical Psychologist, Placement Supervisor, Department of Clinical Psychology, Forman Christian College, University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

^c PhD Scholar, National Institute of Psychology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

^d MS Scholar, Institute of Professional Psychology, Bahria University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, Punjab, Pakistan.

indicate that the ratio of educated females remains significantly low due to various factors, including the conservative nature of society, issues related to purdah (veiling), early puberty, preference for male children, and patriarchal societal norms (Aziz et al., [2023](#)).

Moreover, women often lack freedom of expression and are excluded from decision-making. They are expected to marry young and are frequently denied the opportunity for proper education. Education is essential because it involves the acquisition of general knowledge, development of reasoning and judgment, and preparation for a mature, responsible life. It empowers individuals to realize their purpose and potential as members of society (Kuhn, [1986](#); Pokhilenko et al., [2024](#)).

Education is crucial for both males and females; it is not exclusive to one gender. This study aims to highlight the importance of education, especially for women, as basic education protects them from various forms of exploitation and fraud. In some Pakistani communities, such as among the Pakhtoons, daughters are not allowed to pursue higher education because it is perceived as unreligious and unethical. Cultural and religious values are often used as excuses to prevent girls from receiving an education (Qadir, [2023](#)).

The term "social support" frequently arises in discussions about human relationships. Social support refers to having friends, family, and others to rely on during times of hardship or crisis, helping to build a broader perspective and a positive self-image. It enhances quality of life and serves as a buffer against adversity (Freak-Poli et al., [2022](#)). It also encompasses care, assistance, love, and a sense of security from relatives, friends, or the community (Cutrona, [2000](#)). Social support is especially critical for women in Pakistan, as they are not as independent as men. In Pakistani society, women are often viewed as the bearers of family "honor and respect" and are expected to comply with their family's decisions. Therefore, social support from family is essential for women to make decisions about their own lives. In some cases, however, women from conservative families marry into supportive households that allow them to continue their education (Maqsood et al., [2012](#)).

Mental well-being includes emotional, psychological, and social health. It affects how people think, feel, and act, as well as how they handle stress, relate to others, and make decisions (Baldwin et al., [2021](#)). It is an essential part of overall health. A person's mental well-being can be influenced by several factors, especially for married women—education plays a significant role in enhancing mental health (Liu & Heshmati, [2023](#)). Social support from a husband's family—or a lack thereof—can greatly impact a woman's mental well-being and daily functioning in Pakistan. Traditionally, women around the world have been responsible for raising children and managing the household, while men have been expected to work and provide for the family. This gender-based division of labor has contributed to the perception that men are more suitable for managerial roles than women (Klebanow, [1989](#)).

In the study *The Influence of Education on Women's Well-Being: Evidence from Australia*, findings showed that higher education levels were associated with greater eudaimonic and hedonic well-being, more positive affect, and reduced psychological distress—highlighting a non-monetary benefit of education (Tran et al., [2021](#)). Similarly, the study *Social Networks, Social Capital, Social Support and Academic Success in Higher Education: A Systematic Review with a Special Focus on 'Underrepresented' Students* (Mishra, [2020](#)) emphasized that social factors significantly affect academic success. Students' networks—including family, ethnicity, religion, friends, and faculty—were shown to contribute to their academic outcomes.

Women's education continues to be undervalued, particularly in rural and suburban areas of Pakistan, where women are expected to remain at home and do household chores, while men are seen as the primary earners. In the study *Women's Education in Pakistan: Hidden Fences on Open Frontiers*, female participants acknowledged the challenges of overcoming social and cultural barriers such as poverty, dowry, and early marriage to pursue higher education (Noureen & Awan, [2011](#)).

Although there is substantial literature on the deprivation of educational continuation and the lack of social support among Pakistani women, studies comparing married and unmarried women with respect to educational continuation, social support, and mental well-being are limited. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap and provide useful implications for improving the well-being of Pakistani women. Social

support is operationalized as support from significant others, family, and friends, while mental well-being is operationalized in terms of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between continued education, perceived social support (from family, friends, and significant others), and mental well-being (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance) among married and unmarried women.
2. To explore the difference between married and unmarried in terms of values, social support and education continuation.

Hypotheses

1. There is likely to be a positive and significant relationship between continued education, perceived social support (from family, friends, and significant others), and mental well-being (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance) among married and unmarried women.
2. There are likely to be differences among married and unmarried women in terms of social support, educational continuation and mental wellbeing.
3. There is likely to be a predictive role of social support on the mental wellbeing of married and unmarried women.

Methodology

A correlational research design was used to explore the relationship between perceived social support and psychological well-being among married and unmarried women. Using non-probability convenience sampling, 210 females were approached, and data from 200 participants (aged 16–50 years, M = 22, SD = 5.86) were collected. Inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 16 years old and have education equal to or above matriculation level. Women with or without children were included, while those in second marriages, divorced, widowed, or with physical disabilities or mental illnesses were excluded. The study used the 12-item Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), which measures perceived support from significant others, family, and friends (Zimet et al., 1990), and the 42-item Ryff Psychological Well-Being (PWB) Scale (Ryff, 1995) to measure well-being across six dimensions. Data were collected via a survey method, with participants briefed on confidentiality and informed consent. The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring participants' rights to withdraw, confidentiality, and dignity throughout.

Result

Table 1

Frequencies and Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=200)

Variables	N	%
Age (M, SD)	22.5	5.8
Marital Status		
Married	37	18.5
Unmarried	163	81.5
Level of Education		
Undergraduate	152	76.0
Graduate	32	16.0
Postgraduate	16	8.0
Family system		
Joint	71	35.5
Nuclear	129	64.5

Variables	N	%
Children		
No	176	88.0
Yes	24	12.0
Family Income(M, SD)	327237	73002
SES		
Upper class	35	17.5
Middle class	152	76.0
Lower class	13	6.5
Family Support		
Yes	185	92.5
No	15	7.5
Preference		
Marriage	40	20.0
Education	159	79.5

The above table shows that in the present study, sample contained 18 % married and 81% unmarried women from which 76% were undergraduate ,16% were graduate and 8% were post graduate. Among this sample 35% reported living in joint family system while 64 % reported living in nuclear family system.88% of the sample reported no children while 12% reported having children. From the sample 17% belonged to upper class, 76% to middle class and 6% to lower class. In the sample 92% reported having family support while 7% reported not having family support for education continuation.20% of the sample reportedly preferred marriage while 79% reportedly preferred education over marriage.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation among Multidimensional Social Support and Psychological well- being (N=200)

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	MPSS		.87**	.82**	.76**	.36**	.19**	.31**	.04	.44**	.07	.36**
2	SO			.60**	.52**	.31**	.12	.27**	.04	.39**	.06	.32**
3	FAM				.40**	.28**	.19**	.24**	.01	.35**	.01	.32**
4	FRI					.30**	.15*	.25**	.05	.35**	.09	.25**
5	PWB						.61**	.60**	.64**	.66**	.65**	.76**
6	Auto							.41**	.25**	.25**	.25**	.33**
7	E.M								.21**	.34**	.21**	.31**
8	PG									.22**	.46**	.41**
9	PR										.22**	.52**
10	PIL											.39**
11	SA											

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 Multidimensional Perceived Social Support – Significant other =SO, Family = FAM, Friends = FRI, Psychological well-being = PWB, Autonomy = Auto, Environmental Mastery = E.M, Personal Growth = PG, Positive Relations = PR, Purpose in Life = PIL, Self – Acceptance = SA.

In the above table, Pearson product moment correlation is carried out which showed that Social Support is positively and significantly correlated with social support from significant others, family, friends, Psychological Wellbeing, environmental mastery, positive relations, and self-acceptance whereas, Social Support shows no correlation with personal growth and purpose in life.

Table 3*Regression Analysis for Multidimensional Social Support and Psychological wellbeing (N=200)*

Predictors	B	β	SE
Constant	130.7***		5.68
MPSS	.50***	.36	.09
R ²	.13		
ΔR^2	.13		
F	30.10		

Note: β = Beta, * $p < 0.05$, MPSS = Multidimensional perceived social support

In the above table, the value of R square change shows overall variance of 13 which indicates social support was found to be significant positive predictor of Psychological well – being. The value of R² which is .13 shows that the predictor variable Social Support explained 13% variance in psychological wellbeing with F (1,197) = 30.10, $p < .001$. The findings revealed that Social Support predicted psychological well-being ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$)

Table 4*Independent Samples T-test Comparing Social Support and Psychological well –being Among Women Living in Joint or Nuclear Family System (N=200)*

	Joint family (n = 71)		Nuclear (n = 129)		95% CI				
Variables	M	SD	M	SD	t (198)	p	LL	UL	Cohen's d
MPSS	57.3	16.8	62.0	13.8	-2.1	.03	-9.1	-.38	0.30
MPSS – SO	18.3	7.31	20.7	6.00	-2.4	.01	-4.2	-.50	0.35
MPSS – FAM	19.9	6.65	21.4	5.74	-1.6	.09	-3.2	.26	0.24
MPSS – FRI	19.0	5.74	19.9	5.61	-1.0	.31	-2.4	.80	0.14
PWB	157.5	21.7	162.9	20.1	-1.7	.08	-11.4	.69	0.25

Note: Multidimensional Perceived Social Support – Significant other =SO, Family = FAM, Friends = FRI, Psychological wellbeing = PWB

Independent T-test scores indicated women living in nuclear family system scored higher on social support (M = 62.0, SD = 13.8) as compared to women from joint family systems (M = 57.3, SD = 16.8) with effect size of .30. There is also a significant difference ($p = .01$, $p < .05$) among women living in the joint family system from women living in the nuclear system in terms of support from significant others with effect size of .35.

Table 5*Independent Samples T-test Comparing Social Support and Psychological Well-being among People who Reported Social Support or Not (N=200)*

	Yes (n = 185)		No (n = 15)		95% CI				
Variables	M	SD	M	SD	t (198)	p	LL	UL	Cohen's d
MPSS	61.3	14.4	49.0	19.0	3.1	.00	2.3	23.0	0.83
SO	20.1	6.3	16.6	8.6	2.0	.04	.89	9.9	0.82
FAM	21.3	5.8	15.2	6.6	3.8	.00	.94	9.4	0.82
FRI	19.8	5.6	17.2	6.0	1.7	.08	-1.6	5.8	0.38
PWB	161.9	20.7	149.1	18.6	2.3	.02	-9.3	25.7	0.31

Note: Multidimensional Perceived Social Support – Significant other =SO, Family = FAM, Friends = FRI, Psychological wellbeing = PWB

Independent T-test scores indicated that women who reported getting family support scored higher on social support (M = 61.3, SD = 14.4) than women who did not report having family support (M = 49.0, SD = 19.0) with effect size of .83, along with significant difference in Social Support from Significant other, and family ($p < .05$). There is also a significant difference ($p = .02$, $p < .05$) on psychological well – being with effect size of .31.

Discussion

The research highlights that in Pakistan—particularly in rural areas—patriarchal and cultural norms limit women's access to education, thereby slowing overall societal progress (Ayub & Ullah, [2023](#)). Women who are educated and receive social support enjoy greater psychological well-being and autonomy, while those denied these opportunities often experience dependence and reduced prospects (Javed et al., [2016](#)). The results confirm that social support significantly influences both educational continuation and mental well-being among married and unmarried women.

In a joint family system, social support plays a critical role in determining whether a woman can pursue education. The greater the support in such settings, the higher the level of independence a woman tends to achieve. Afghanistan faces similar challenges, where cultural barriers hinder female education (Shayan, [2015](#)). In general, societal pressures restrict women's personal development. However, women with supportive families or in-laws often find that their ability to continue education is not necessarily limited by their marital status (Habib et al., [2019](#)).

The research found considerable differences between married and unmarried women in terms of social support and mental well-being. Data from 200 respondents revealed that while families increasingly support unmarried women in pursuing education, married women frequently face barriers due to a lack of support from in-laws or husbands. The prevailing expectation that women should sacrifice personal development for family responsibilities further limits their opportunities. Prior studies have shown that girls' education is often deprioritized in favor of marriage and dowry (Noureen & Awan, [2011](#); Imran, [2023](#)). However, a shifting trend indicates that more women are receiving education before marriage, although pursuing education after marriage remains a significant challenge.

Another key finding was that social support is a strong predictor of psychological well-being. Women with strong family and social connections showed better mental health, with emotional support playing a particularly crucial role during times of adversity (Avasthi, [2010](#)). Additionally, women living in nuclear families demonstrated greater social support and psychological well-being compared to those in joint family systems, where traditional values often place intense pressure on women.

In Pakistan's patriarchal culture, women's autonomy is limited, and important life decisions are typically made by male family members (Janjua & Kamal, [2024](#)). The research identified significant differences in how social support influences psychological well-being, particularly when it comes to decisions about delaying marriage for educational purposes. A woman's ability to continue studying is often dictated by family decisions, reinforcing the dominant role of men as primary decision-makers and financial providers.

Limitations & Suggestions

The findings are specific to Lahore and may not be representative of other regions or countries. Future research should include a larger and more diverse sample, incorporating rural areas and various social classes to produce more generalizable insights. Economic conditions and career development should also be examined as potential factors influencing education continuation and mental health. Additionally, future studies could benefit from the development of a dedicated instrument to measure educational continuation.

Implications

This research carries important policy implications for government institutions, media, and NGOs. Governments can support women by establishing daycare centers at workplaces and educational institutions, enabling them to pursue their goals without neglecting childcare responsibilities. Media campaigns can promote positive messaging that encourages families to support women's education and autonomy. NGOs can use these findings to design targeted interventions, especially for married women facing abuse or lack of support, ensuring that assistance reaches those who need it most.

References

- Akhter, N., & Akbar, R. A. (2016). Critical analysis of life of Pakistani women: Views of educated women. *Journal of Elementary education*, 26(1), 111–121. [https://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/JEE/PDF/7_Nasreen%20&%20Rafaqat.26\(1\).pdf](https://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/JEE/PDF/7_Nasreen%20&%20Rafaqat.26(1).pdf)
- Ali, M., Zin, M. L. B. M., & Hassan, Z. B. (2019). The impact of social support and corporate culture on women career advancement. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7(3), 303–312. <https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhss.2019.0703.0088>
- Avasthi, A. (2010). Preserve and strengthen family to promote mental health. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 52(2), 113–126. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.64582>
- Ayub, M., A. S., & Ullah, S. (2023). Impact of socio-cultural factors on female education in Suleman Khel Tribe of district south Waziristan, Pakistan. *Contemporary Issues in Social Sciences and Management Practices*, 4(4), 171–183. <https://doi.org/10.61503/cissmp.v2i4.91>
- Aziz, S. Z., Begum, M., Ullah, A., & Imad, M. (2023). A critical review of low school enrollment and literacy rates among girls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(4), 44–50. <https://doi.org/10.55737/qjss.349445149>
- Baldwin, D., Sinclair, J., & Simons, G. (2021). What is mental wellbeing? *BJPsych Open*, 7(S1), S236–S236. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjo.2021.631>
- Boykin, V. (2023). *The Role of Social Support in Achieving Workplace Equity-Women Know What's Needed*. Northcentral University.
- Bradley, T., & Saigol, R. (2016). *Religious values and beliefs and education for women in Pakistan*. In *Religion, Religious Organisations and Development* (pp. 55–68). Routledge.
- Cutrona, C. E. (2000). Social support principles for strengthening families. *Family support in disadvantaged families*, 103–122.
- Freak-Poli, R., Ryan, J., Tran, T., Owen, A., McHugh Power, J., Berk, M., Stocks, N., Gonzalez-Chica, D., Lowthian, J. A., Fisher, J., & Byles, J. (2022). Social isolation, social support and loneliness as independent concepts, and their relationship with health-related quality of life among older women. *Aging & Mental Health*, 26(7), 1335–1344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2021.1940097>
- Habib, K., Shafiq, M., Afshan, G., & Qamar, F. (2019). Impact of education and employment on women empowerment. *European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences: Proceedings*, 8(3 (s)), pp-62. https://european-science.com/eojnss_proc/article/view/5854
- Hill, M. A., & King, E. M. (1993). Women's education in developing countries: An overview. *Women's education in developing countries: Barriers, benefits and policies*, 1–50.
- Imran, R. (2023). *Work-Family Responsibilities and Support for Women Academics in Pakistan* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Waikato).
- Janjua, M. M., & Kamal, A. (2024). Understanding the Role of Patriarchy in Perpetuating Child Marriages in Pakistan: A Qualitative Exploration. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 5(4), 117–131.
- Javed, S., Javed, S., & Khan, A. (2016). Effect of education on quality of life and well being. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 3(4). <https://doi.org/10.25215/0304.053>
- Klebanow, S. (1989). Power, gender, and money. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 17(2), 321–328. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jaap.1.1989.17.2.321>
- König, J., Jäger-Biela, D. J., & Glutsch, N. (2020). Adapting to online teaching during COVID-19 school closure: teacher education and teacher competence effects among early career teachers in Germany. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(4), 608–622. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1809650>
- Kuhn, D. (1986). Education for thinking. *Teachers College Record* (1970), 87(4), 495–512. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146818608700404>
- Liu, S., & Heshmati, A. (2023). Relationship between education and well-being in China. *Journal of Social and Economic Development*, 25(1), 123–151. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40847-022-00193-1>
- Maqsood, S., & Maqsood, F. (2017). Educated females participation in labor market: The role of structural barriers. *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies*, 14(1), 195–206. <https://doi.org/10.46568/pjgs.v14i1.149>
- Mishra, S. (2020). Social networks, social capital, social support and academic success in higher education: A systematic review with a special focus on 'underrepresented' students. *Educational Research Review*, 29, 100307. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2019.100307>

- Noureen, G., & Awan, R. -. (2011). Women's education in Pakistan: Hidden fences on open frontiers. *Asian Social Science*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v7n2p79>
- Pokhilenko, I., Gutierrez-Colosia, M. R., Janssen, L. M., Evers, S. M., Paulus, A. T., Drost, R. M., Campoy-Muñoz, P., Simon, J., & Salvador-Carulla, L. (2024). Clarifying terminology and definitions in education services for mental health users: A disambiguation study. *PLOS ONE*, 19(7), e0306539. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0306539>
- Putra, I. G., Dendup, T., & Januraga, P. P. (2020). The roles of women empowerment on attitude for safer sex negotiation among Indonesian married women. *Women & Health*, 61(1), 95-108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03630242.2020.1831685>
- Qadir, A. (2023). *Identifying the various factors that influence a family's decision to educate their daughters in South Waziristan* (Doctoral dissertation, Department of Sociology, Forman Christian College (A Chartered University)).
- Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69(4), 719-727. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.69.4.719>
- Shayan, Z. (2015). Gender inequality in education in Afghanistan: Access and barriers. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 05(05), 277-284. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2015.55035>
- Tran, D. B., Pham, T. D., & Nguyen, T. T. (2021). The influence of education on women's well-being: Evidence from Australia. *PLOS ONE*, 16(3), e0247765. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0247765>
- Wang, Y., Wan, Q., Huang, Z., Huang, L., & Kong, F. (2017). Psychometric properties of multi-dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support in Chinese parents of children with cerebral palsy. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02020>
- Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988). The multidimensional scale of perceived social support. *Journal of personality assessment*, 52(1), 30-41. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa5201_2
- Zimet, G., Powell, S., Farley, G., Werkman, S., & Berkoff, K. (1990). Psychometric characteristics of the multidimensional scale of perceived social support. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 55(3), 610-617. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa5503&4_17