

Differences over Marital Adjustment of Living Apart Together Couples and Proximal Couples

Shikha Johari, Ritu Singh* and Manisha Mehra

ABSTRACT

Many couples are unable to envision the kind of adjustments required to transition smoothly from one phase of the marital relationship to another. The expectations from marital life are often skewed leading to disappointments. Thus, for a fulfilling relationship, the couples have to develop abilities to anticipate potholes and make adjustments readily. Marital adjustment of every couple is unique and like any other domain of adjustment it too is defined by childhood experiences, family type, family structure etc. The present study aimed at assessing and comparing the similarities and differences in marital adjustment across new form of family, that is, living apart together couple families (LATC) and proximal couple families (PC). Dyadic Adjustment tool was administered to 75 living apart together couples and 75 proximal couples drawn through snowball sampling from Distt. U.S. Nagar of Uttarakhand. Both, husband and wife's responses on marital adjustment were recorded using mixed methods of data collection namely mailed questionnaire, face to face and telephonic interviews. Statistical analysis of the data showed that living apart together couples practiced significantly higher affectional expression than proximal couples. Both forms of couples were seen to be statistically similar on dyadic consensus, cohesion and satisfaction. Hence, proximal and long distance marital relationships have their own pros and cons, however, it entirely depends on couples how they convert cons into pros.

Keywords: Commuter couple, Compatibility, Distant relationship, Dyadic adjustment, Proximity

INTRODUCTION

Adjustment refers to the behavioral processes of transformation and exploration aimed at acquiring a sense of balance or acceptance. An individual's adjustment is considered adequate to the extent with which he establishes a harmonious relationship between himself and the conditions, situations and persons who comprise his physical and social environment. It is a dynamic process in which an individual makes conscious and deliberate efforts to adapt in a way that makes them complementary to another. Certain familial factors like family type, structure, environment, and so on, affect the developmental course of an individual as a child

and in turn how he/she would make adjustments into different phases of life. For example, adolescents from joint families have better emotional adjustment than those from nuclear families (Adeoye, 2009). Similarly, it was observed adolescents from biological nuclear homes reported substantially higher adaptability socially, emotionally and compositely than those from foster homes (Dhyani and Singh, 2013). Another study revealed that a conflicting family environment is associated with adolescents' insecurity and psychological distress, which affect their adjustment in different areas of life (Wissink, 2006). Familial relations especially marital relationships are believed to provide the most intimate context for individuals to develop strong adjustment patterns. Factors

such as personality, basic values or beliefs, age, gender, educational qualifications of the couples as well as patterns they have witnessed as children in their families of origin influence the way they handle their marital life adjustment issues.

Conflicts and day to day hassles are part of virtually every marital relationship and must be seen as situations which if handled appropriately can strengthen the relationship. The key to a successful marriage isn't an absolute absence of disagreements but its working together as a couple to develop effective strategies of resolving the conflicts. Not only does a healthy marital relationship create a fulfilling life, but it also creates a sense of well-being. Dyadic adjustment is "the integration of the couple in a union in which two personalities are not merely merged but interact to complement each other for satisfaction and achievement of common objectives" (Ernest and Leonard, 1939). If adequate opportunities and space for growth are not experienced and realized fully, death of a marital relationship is inevitable. Dyadic adjustment, therefore, calls for maturity that accepts, understands and encourages growth and development of both the spouses. One needs to view his partner as a product of his distinct life experiences in their respective socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, a fulfilling intimate relationship is inclusive of satisfaction between partners characterized by mutual concern, care, understanding, and acceptance. In the traditional setup, the married couples lived together. Whereas, in today's context, both men and women are striving to develop their individuality and thus the married couples often have to live apart because of their careers. Hence, it is necessary to examine how LAT or commuter couples handle the challenges associated with the creation and maintenance of cohesive partnerships. In India, there have been very few studies on the dyadic adjustment of the living apart couples, especially in contrast to the proximal couples. Therefore, the present study has been taken up with the view of finding an answer to which holds more truth; "out of sight, out of mind" or "absence makes the heart grow fonder".

METHODOLOGY

One hundred fifty couples (75 Living Apart Together Couples and 75 Proximal couples) meeting the eligibility

criteria for inclusion under present study were identified using snowball sampling technique from District. Udham Singh Nagar. Dyadic Adjustment tool was administered with both husbands and wives. During selection of living apart together couples visiting family only 2 to 3 times in a month, dual earner family, at least one adolescent child residing with one of the living apart together parents and family members do not suffer from any serious/treatable physical or psychological problem were chosen as criterion whereas for proximal couples living together under one roof, dual earner families, at least one adolescent child residing in the family and family members do not suffer from any serious/ treatable physical and psychological problem were the criterion. Marital adjustment of living apart together and proximal couples were assessed using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale by Spanier (1976). Dyadic Adjustment Scale is a thirty-two item scale and includes the four subscales: Dyadic Consensus, Dyadic Cohesion, Dyadic Satisfaction and Affectional Expression. Respondents were asked to rate each of the items on a Likert scale by choosing the most suitable response options. Respondents were also asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree on each item. The research tool administered being western in origin was pre-tested before administering with the respondents for assessing its reliability and validity. Pre-testing confirmed the application of the said tool in original form without any modification. SPSS version 20 software was used for analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 depicts numerical difference in mean scores of husbands from living apart together couple and proximal couple families across all domains of dyadic adjustment. However, independent sample t-test in Table 1 elicits significant ($p < .05$) statistical difference in affectional expression $\{t(148) = 4.826; p = .000\}$ of husbands from LATC and PC families. Husbands from LATC families were seen to be significantly more affectionate in comparison to husbands from PC families. Findings of a study reported that LDRs are, interestingly; better off than PRs in some instances. It reported that long-distance relationship partners scored substantially higher than couples in proximal relationships in the

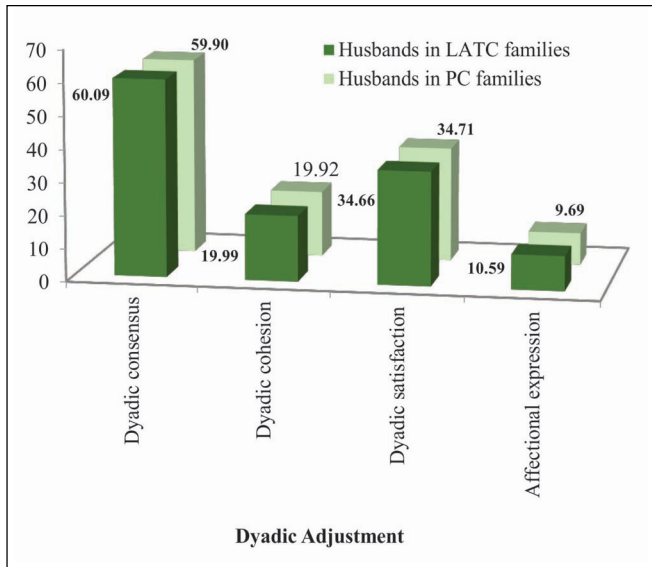


Figure 1: Mean scores of husbands from living apart together couple and proximal couple families on dyadic adjustment

dimensions of love, idealistic distortion, positive reminiscence, perceived agreement, and communication quality (Stafford and Merolla, 2007). It is well said that absence makes the heart grow fonder. The excitement of the marital life remains constant if one is in a long-

distance relationship with their partner. The joy of having to meet each other after a significant period remains novel. The couple tries to employ new ways to keep the spark alive. Married men in LDR enact a heightened frequency for relational continuity and communication during periods of spousal separation (Anand *et al.*, 2017). Long-distance relationships have significantly higher levels of adjustment, love for the partner, fun with the partner, and conversational quality (Kelmer *et al.*, 2013). The plausible reason for the said difference in expression of affection might be that husbands in PC families eventually become accustomed to each other’s needs, wants and habits. For instance, the spouses in these families do not essentially feel the need to put an extra effort to make their married life feel wonderful and fulfilling. They relate with one another by constantly making role transitions. Their idea of intimacy and affection may entail carrying out day to day roles and responsibilities and resolving day to day hassles.

Whereas, husbands in the LATC families have to create opportunities to express affection with their partners. Qualitative research on long-distance

Table 1: Statistical differences in mean scores of husbands from living apart together couple and proximal couple families on dyadic adjustment

	Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. error difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Dyadic consensus									
Equal variances assumed	37.10	.00	.34	148	.74	.19	.55	-.91	1.28
Equal variances not assumed			.34	122.83	.74	.19	.55	-.91	1.28
Dyadic cohesion									
Equal variances assumed	2.04	.16	.44	148	.66	.07	.15	-.24	.37
Equal variances not assumed			.44	133.22	.66	.07	.15	-.24	.37
Dyadic satisfaction									
Equal variances assumed	21.14	.00	-.17	148	.86	-.05	.31	-.67	.56
Equal variances not assumed			-.17	119.44	.86	-.05	.31	-.67	.56
Affectional expression									
Equal variances assumed	.00	.97	4.83	148	.00	.89	.19	.53	1.26
Equal variances not assumed			4.826	146.09	.00	.89	.19	.53	1.26

relationships also indicates that long-distance couples tend to avoid or postpone conflict (Sahlstein, 2004). This means they would feel more motivated and enthusiastic about engaging in activities that help enhance their relationship quality. Even though LDR people report more stressors than their proximal counterparts, married people in LDR reported comparable, and in some cases better psychological and physical health relative to their proximal counterparts (Du Bois *et al.*, 2016). Since couples in long-distance relationships appear to spend more time away from each other than physically close couples, they have more time to recall the positive times together or work on “reconfiguring” their feelings, contributing to an improvement in the quality of relationships (Jacobs and Lyubomirsky, 2013).

On the other hand, Table 1 shows that husbands from LATC families were statistically similar to husbands in PC families on consensus, cohesion and satisfaction dimension of marital adjustment. This is in line with the findings of a study that reported similar level of relationship satisfaction among individuals in long distance relationships as well as their geographically-close counterparts (Dargie *et al.*, 2015). To create and maintain an emotional bond in a relationship, partners should provide a comfortable haven and considerable guidance in times of need (Pistole *et al.*, 2010). In a healthy marital relationship, communication serves as a conduit for reaching heights of admiration, genuineness and trust. Communication has two components, first clearly communicating your concerns, emotions, needs and wishes and second actively listening to the sentiments of your partner for resonating with each other. Effective communication enhances intimacy and helps the partners in gaining a profound understanding of how to proceed in a relationship. Communication via technology such as e-mail, mobile phone applications etc. have made it easier to connect with our significant other in seconds. Also, talking about the memorable instances in life takes one back to the moments spent together which enhances emotional bond among the spouses. The vast majority of those in commuting relationships rate their communication with their spouses as excellent or good (Landesman and Seward, 2013).

Analysis of wives from living apart together couple and proximal couple families on dyadic adjustment too shows a pattern similar to that seen among husbands. Figure 2 reflects the mean scores of wives from two groups of study on all dimensions of dyadic adjustment. Table 2 highlights statistical significant ($p < .05$) difference among wives from LATC and PC families on affectional expression $\{t(108.64)=5.324; p=.000\}$ dimension of dyadic adjustment. On comparing data, wives from LATC families were found to be significantly more affectionate than wives from PC families. Research has indicated that partners can fulfill non-physical relational needs from disparate locations and may consequently influence one another across distance (Le and Agnew, 2001). According to a study, wives in living apart together marriages reported that the limited opportunities to get together actually increase the purposefulness and meaningfulness of the time they spend with their partner (Jackson *et al.*, 2000).

Earlier, women were pre-programmed to be dependent on men because of stereotypical roles and responsibilities expected of them. However, in a modern context; because of changing family structures, women are becoming highly independent emotionally and financially. This is evident from a study reporting higher emotional dependency of wives on husbands when wives were either unemployed or having educational qualification only up to matriculation and below (Singh

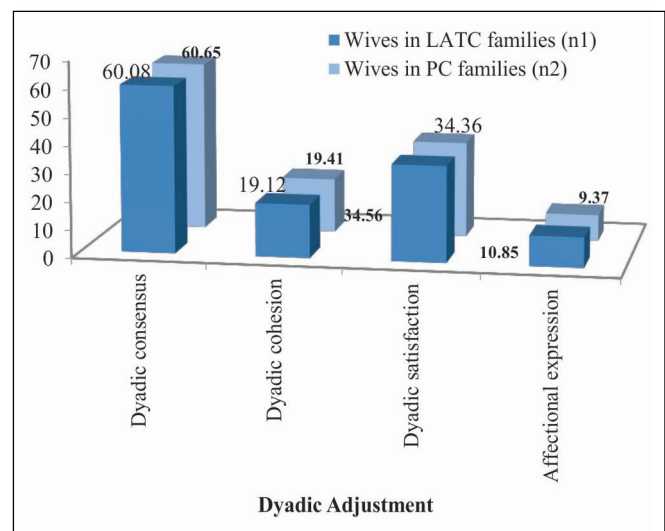


Figure 2: Mean scores of wives from living apart together couple and proximal couple families on dyadic adjustment

Table 2: Statistical differences in mean scores of wives from living apart together couple and proximal couple families on dyadic adjustment

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. error difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Dyadic consensus									
Equal variances assumed	11.45	.001	-.96	148	.34	-.57	.60	-1.76	.61
Equal variances not assumed			-.96	135.95	.34	-.57	.60	-1.76	.61
Dyadic cohesion									
Equal variances assumed	18.30	.000	-1.23	148	.22	-.29	.24	-.77	.18
Equal variances not assumed			-1.23	121.46	.22	-.29	.24	-.77	.18
Dyadic satisfaction									
Equal variances assumed	15.14	.000	.95	148	.35	.19	.20	-.20	.58
Equal variances not assumed			.95	125.79	.35	.19	.20	-.20	.58
Affectional expression									
Equal variances assumed	155.70	.000	5.32	148	.00	1.48	.28	.93	2.03
Equal variances not assumed			5.32	108.64	.00	1.48	.28	.92	2.03

et al., 2006). Being in a long-distance relationship, feeling empowered helps women to not feel and exhibit “needy” behaviors and deal with their problems without blaming the partner’s absence. This makes them also understand that certain beliefs and priorities change with time and situations and a willingness to understand and respect the partner will ensure the success of the marital relationship. Because of the immense educational and employment opportunities and vanishing social stigma regarding women earning for a household in traditional Indian society, women are holding on to both, traditional gender expectations and current role transitions with utmost commitment. Empowered women with the support and encouragement of their partners can now use technology to their advantage for voicing their concerns. According to a study majority of women entrepreneurs exhibited medium and low level of technological empowerment (Swetha *et al.*, 2014). Genuine gender equity norms are being upheld by many firms which further encourage women to explore their career options along with managing household responsibilities. Women journalists are encouraged and given freedom to organize their work and do not face

major discrimination in their working spots on the basis of gender and are given decision making positions (Sasikala, 2015).

In LATC families even the simplest things are sweetest and cherished as an expression of love. Wives may enjoy carrying out the caretaking role and hosting their spouse when the couple unites. Sexual compatibility and mutual enjoyment are also important factors contributing to the success of most marital relationships. Women in long-distance relationships reported significant spikes in women’s testosterone levels (evidence of sexual anticipation and desire) just before a reunion with a long-distance partner, as well as after first engaging in sexual activity following a period of abstinence due to distance (Hamilton and Meston, 2010).

Further, Table 2 elicits no significant difference in dyadic consensus, cohesion and satisfaction among couples from LATC and PC families. The relationship thrives when the partners can communicate their love despite geographical distance. Living apart partners may emphasize the closeness that does not require physical

or geographical proximity. They tend to value autonomy and space for both the partners to develop on an individual level. People often think that long-distance relationships are quite complicated to handle, as the couples in LATC families are not able to see each other often, which affects the emotional dynamics of the couple. Because of the physical distance and separation–reunion cycle, attachment and closeness may not influence relationship functioning in the same way for LATCs and PCs, even if satisfaction is similar. There may be a persistent recurring “honeymoon effect”, a period marked by the celebration of compatibilities as well as recognizing and accepting incompatibilities. Also, resolving disagreements is very less likely to involve heated arguments and physical aggression and hence give time to the couple to develop effective conflict resolution strategies.

CONCLUSION

Data analysis revealed that couples living apart together exercised substantially greater affectional expression than proximal couples. Dyadic consensus, cohesion and satisfaction were shown to be statistically identical in both types of couples. Proximal and long distance marital relationships cannot be ranked as both have their own pros and cons. However, distance in LATC helps assess the quality and strength of the relationship beyond the physical. Hence, proximal couples must acknowledge and incorporate expression of affection in novel ways. It helps keep the spark in a relationship alive. Couples must provide opportunities for both the partners to develop their individuality and assert a certain level of autonomy which is very essential for a healthy married life.

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