

“Unrealistic marriage expectations and Depression- An Integrated teaching plan for college students in India”

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Abstract

In India Post- Nuptial depression is real. In 2018 a national survey has been conducted on 152 women, in which 12% diagnosed as depressed post wedding. Post nuptial depression is not only about women and abuses. The other prevailing factor is the unrealistic marriage expectations which both genders develop at a young age due to factors such as media, people around them, fantasies, etc., Depression begins when the discrepancy is too large between the expectations and reality. This article is based on the recent 10 years marriage expectations and depression literature and concludes by the ideology of developing an integrated teaching program for college students in India along with their subject curriculum. The possible benefits of this program is to encourage students to apply the content in their real life and help them understand the consequences of discrepancies, prevent them from depression and to mould them in their appropriate age to handle the expectations efficiently to have an overall satisfied psychological and marital wellbeing. This article contains the proposed theory named “Expectation-depression cycle” which is developed after analysing the literature. This can be used in therapeutic counselling practices for breaking the unhealthy cognitive patterns which creates unrealistic expectations in individuals.

Keywords: Marriage expectations; post-nuptial depression; Couple conflicts; Marital teaching; Marital discords; Suicide; Integrated teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is the union of two individuals who get united legally, culturally and accept to live together for the rest of their lives as spouses. There is no proper universally accepted definition of marriages but there are authors and leaders gave their own such as “marriage is a contract for the production and maintenance of children” (Malinowski), “marriage is the approved social pattern for where two individuals maintain a family” (Horton and Hunt), “It is a relatively permanent bond between permissible mates” (Robert H. Lowie) etc [1].

India is known best for lot of wedding systems. Historically, the marriage tradition has been called the “Swayamvaram” which has its origin from Vedic religion which became popular when Rama and Sita got married following Swayamvaram. In this tradition the girl will be given some prior information about the men who are going to participate in the swayamvaram. And then on the day of swayamvaram, there will be competitions which will show the potentials and strengths of the men who are participating.

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This will be arranged by the father of the bride, every man would participate in that and the bride shows her interest in the man whom she likes by garlanding the person. Thus they will choose a groom based on this and arrange wedding for them both. Then after this "Gandharva marriage" came into practice by which Dushyanta and Shakuntala got married in this tradition. It is a simple marriage with mutual consent of the both which has no witness or follow any rituals. Since orthodox Hinduism started evolving in 500 BC, the marriage traditions and systems started to change based on castes. Child marriages started its decline gradually with strict rules in India after the legal age was defined for marriage (21 for boys and 18 for girls) currently. Later after the independence, the literacy growth and the economy started to enhance, Marriages are seen as the event which maintains the family's reputation, with the rise of internet and technologies parents look for marriage matrimonies or match making websites for marriages. Then the traditional arranged marriages started slowing down, "self-arranged or love marriage" started its baby steps in all societies of India. Now both in rural and urban regions the parents now follow marriage steps in arranged marriages that makes their son and daughter those who are getting married meet and discuss the expectations, similarities and dissimilarities, financial planning, future planning prior to the marriage. And now with more modern individual exposures to social media and independence both men and women have the freedom to choose their partners. They interact with lots of people over social media, there is a chance they like each other and get married. This is another trend for current marriages in India. Different cultures and different religions have their own traditions of marriage, yet the concept of arranged and love marriages are the same in all societies, cultures and castes [2].

The partnership of two individuals who accept to have love, care and affection towards each other and desire to be together and build a family and decide what is best for both is called as marriage. As this is considered as one of the major life events for both persons as well for their families, it is natural to have expectations towards marriage. The root cause of these expectations are mostly because of the people we see and interact, parents and relatives. Seeing them from our childhood we develop expectations of our future, and media influences play a major role. These expectations do not necessarily want to be real, they might be filled with fantasy, unrealistic and imaginary, rational or irrational ones. If one is not careful, the expectations we set would end up with negative or even dangerous consequences of marriage life. Both men and women fall into depression and other serious mental health disorders after getting married mainly because their expectations are not satisfied and they start to regret their decision about marriage and live their lives unconsciously.

RELATED STUDIES

This includes the collection of studies which have been done

on marriages, depression, human needs, and reasons for the marital discords, marital expectations and marital therapy which contributes to the unhealthy pattern of setting marital expectations which leads into a problematic marital behaviour, end of marriages, mental disorders and suicides.

Wimberly in 1989 framed a theory named "Symbolic Interactionism", this explains how individuals define and act in marriage. This is also used to study the relationship between subjective understanding and their reactions to it on areas including family, religion, workplace, community etc [17]. Amato and Booth in 1997 said that individual's conceptualization of marriage influences the marital behaviour, marital quality and success of the relationship [17].

Larson Jeffry. H in his work "You are my one and only" described about 9 unrealistic beliefs about partner selection. They are namely One and Only belief, Perfect Partner belief, Perfect self, Perfect relationship, Try harder, Love is enough, Cohabitation belief, Opposites compliments each other and Choosing should be easy. These beliefs are made by the individuals when they think of a partner or a marriage. This has to be changed into developing healthy cognitive thoughts by using cognitive techniques. Marital therapy should focus on these 9 beliefs [6].

Srilatha Juvva and Ranbir. S. Bhatti in their work spoke about the "Epigenetic model of marriage expectations". This model focused about the factors namely expectations from partners, expectations from marriage, expectations of partner's family, expectation from the marriage institution, concept of ideal partner. They said that an individual will set some expectations and enter into the marriage life in which these expectations of factors might evolve, refine and change over time. Marital therapy and interventions should focus on these factors while dealing with the couples with marital dysfunctions [7].

Sabetelli in 1988 explained about the "Courtship dilemma". In this he meant that if the marital expectations are low then the marital satisfaction will be high. So in order to avoid having a decline in marital satisfaction individuals can lower their expectations regarding marriage [12]. And a study has been conducted by Lee J. Dixon to find out the effects of efforts of spouse and self in their marital quality of participants who attended the marital enrichment seminar. Marital quality was measured using self-report measures before and after the seminar with 2 months follow up have been made. The results revealed that participants who are dissatisfied with their partner's efforts tend to have reduced marital quality whereas their own efforts dissatisfaction did not [12].

Mary Riege Laner and J. Neil Russel conducted a study which involves a pre-test and post-test study in which college students are exposed to problem-oriented course in the college to test whether the course reduces the marital expectations which are unrealistic. They used Expectation level index scale (ELI) for data collection which was developed by Sabetelli and Pearce in 1986. The results

showed only a little lowering effect that too among women, this study also revealed that unmarried individuals tend to have higher levels of unrealistic expectations rather than couple with 10 years of marital age. This study includes few suggestions to reduce the high level of expectancies [10].

Several other studies conducted by Baucom, Rankin, Epstein, Bradbury and Sabetelli and Pearce revealed that people who have unrealistic and dysfunctional ideations about partner and marriage tend to have marital distress, decreased marital quality and marital discords [17].

PROPOSED THEORY

Expectation - Depression cycle

It is clear from the reviews of previous studies that marriage related cognitive thoughts have an impact on their marital relationship and quality. To make our expectations clear people must know the differentiation of realistic and unrealistic marriage and partner expectations. First step is to know what our expectations are (to recognize). The next step is to differentiate between what is realistic and unrealistic and the third step is to communicate those expectations to the partner whether they can fulfil or fit inside that. Realistic expectations are the ones which can be achievable and functional. Unrealistic expectations are the ones which are mostly silent and we think we can't tell it out loud because we know that is unachievable or unrealistic. These expectations make the marital life unhealthy, hard and even toxic. Not all unrealistic expectations are difficult to achieve, it requires communication, comprehension of thoughts and healthy bonding with the partner to achieve. The problem creators are the expectations which are completely unrealistic. People tend to have different expectations because they are brought up in different environments and different life situations, parenting is different, morality, economy everything will be different so it's natural that they set their expectations according to their circumstances or from people who they see. When these expectations do not match, people start to blame it outward and the problem begins.

The expectations tend to initiate from the marriage type, expenses and expectations of how the partner and in-laws behave to them. Most of the marital issues and discords happen with the partner's expectations (behaviour, attitude, thoughts) and when they are disappointed with that. Most of the separations, divorces and marital dissatisfaction happens with the partner expectations rather than the other factors inside marriage. The breaking stage of the marriage or their own life comes when they are dealing with persistent disappointments. It lead the pathway to stress, frustration, depression, seeing them as a failure, hating the partner, heightened arguments, marital discords. Discords happen when they think that their relationship is wrong, their decision was wrong to fall for a wrong or incompatible partner.

Based on the literature analysis and case studies an

"expectation- depression cycle"(Fig.1) is developed.

EXPECTATION-DEPRESSION CYCLE



Fig.1. Expectation - Depression cycle

Fig.1 depicts the cycle of any individual who develops unrealistic marriage expectations and getting married then expecting the partner to satisfy the expectations which doesn't get satisfied results hurted and end up depressed and tend to have marital separation or divorce or even suicide or killing the partner and again they tend to set another set of illusory expectations without correcting the thought pattern. The marital therapy or pre-marital counselling should focus on the individual's expectations on analysing the life situations, the way they are brought up and their thought processes about marriage or long-term commitment. It should focus on breaking the cycle or developing healthy expectations prior to marriage for the betterment of the individual and the couple's wellbeing.

Integrated Teaching Program:

Erick Erickson, a psychologist developed a predetermined 8 stages of psychosocial development theory. He said every individual undergoes these stages from infancy to adulthood. Successful completion of each step results in healthy personality development of the individual. Adolescence age (12 to 18) is usually termed as the risk-taking age, where the person does everything impulsively and learns through trial and error learning, delaying gratification is really tough during adolescence. And the young adulthood stage (19 to 40) is called the emerging adulthood period where people still have choices to make and figure out a better life for them. As it is the fact that any person can either create or destroy their life by making the better use and the better life choices in the adolescence stage. And it is the stage where we are exposed to a lot of life situations, strangers, friends, media etc, and we tend to develop our expectations according to what we see and whom we spend time with and what we perceive.

The aim of this paper is developing an integrated teaching program for college students in India which should include teachings of marital knowledge. It should be designed with

basic concepts of gender differences, personality, culture, thought process and premarital and post marital concepts (age appropriate), expectations, and its consequences. This should be in the reality basis. This should be taught like any other syllabus they study. Students' mentality of pre and post course completions should be analysed. This teaching program can be implemented in all colleges (medical, arts, engineering, home science and others). Though many schools and colleges offer studies on personality development, soft skills and moral education. Marital knowledge and handling the consequences of their expectations should also be taught at the correct age in people's lives. The aim is to make people become aware of realistic and unrealistic expectations of the partner and marriage at the appropriate age to avoid individual issues at later stages of life. People have choices to make (freedom of choice). People who choose not to marry or take up any commitment in the relationship also can be included in this as adolescence period is an exploration period.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of this Integrated teaching program will result in reduced mental health issues in individuals who might be victims to relationship issues and having lots of unrealistic marital expectations. By learning and becoming aware of the relationships reality at the appropriate age will create many insights to students on relationship expectancies and relationships handling, and individual mental health and consequences of the actions. As Indian parents and families talk and teach about relationships to their children when they attain the age of marriage but before that teaching begins we tend to have developed lots of expectations from learning from the society and media. So it's better to give this knowledge at the adolescent period where they begin to explore so that we can reduce the many damages it can cause to the people in their future. It can possibly reduce suicides, domestic violence, physical abuse, depression due to incompatibility, frustration, marital discords, divorces and inter- relationship and family issues which arise due to the unexpected marital expectations of the individuals. The idea of this teaching program is not only creating awareness about the marital expectations but also enhancing the mental stability of the people and problem handling skill from the very beginning of their exploration age. This can also pave the way for the marital and relationship therapist to look at this perspective by including the concepts of commitment and marital beliefs to the individuals who face trouble due to relationship misconceptions.

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