

# Marital Quality in Military Marriage: A Case Study



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## Abstract

Marital quality among couples employed in military services has been found to be satisfactory as well as unsatisfactory. The present study aimed to determine the marital quality in military marriage and also the various factors attributing to marital quality. Two couples whose one of the spouse is working in military service were chosen in the present study. Marital Quality Scale (MQS) developed by Shah, A (1995) was used which was followed by telephonic interview. Results of the study indicated low marital quality among the two couples in the present study.

**Keywords:** Marital Quality, Military Services, Military Couples, Marital Stability

## Introduction

***"There is no more lovely, friendly and charming relationship, communion or company than a good marriage."***

(Martin Luther, 1483 - 1546 Ibid.353; Marriage poetry bible literature).

Marriage is a social union or legal contract between people that creates kinship. It is an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually intimate and sexual, are acknowledged in a variety of ways, depending on the culture or subculture in which it is found. Such a union, often formalized via a wedding ceremony, may also be called *matrimony*. Marrying holds the promise that we will establish a permanent, loving, supportive relationship with our selected spouse. Accordingly the choice of marriage partner is a major life –course decision. Attention to the high rate of divorce in U.S. has led sociologist Norval Glenn(2002), among others to make a “plea for greater concern about the quality of marital matching. Research suggests that the best way to choose a spouse is to look for a socially responsible, respectful and emotionally supportive mate who demonstrates good communication skills and who is committed both to the relationship and to the value of marriage itself.(Bradbury and Karney 2004; Hetherington 2003). Although romantic love is usually an important ingredient, successful marriages are based on qualities as partner’s common goals and needs, their maturity, qualities of friendship or pragmatic love, and the soundness of their reasons for marriage. (Lacey et al. 2004).

## Marriage in India

India is a land which is rich in tradition and culture. Despite the industrialization and modernisation still the country has a rich social tradition. Central to this tradition is the institution of marriage. Though this institution is under tremendous stress and strain, there is absolutely no doubt that this institution is still very strong in India. Historically, the Indian male has been glorified. In virtually every Indian States of India, women are always taught to "adjust" to different moods of men, at whatever cost, and still live with them throughout their lives, after they are married.

Marriages are always big affairs in India. Marriages are always performed in the presence of a huge number of guests, sometimes running into several thousands; the social sanctity of marriage is very well maintained in India. Marriage is a multi-billion business in India. Apart from the gold, the feeding of guests are very elaborate affairs. Recently, there is a rise in inter-state, inter-caste, love marriage which makes marriages more interesting. The culture of India, is very unique and despite the industrialization and globalization occurring marriages will survive.

**There are different types of marriage** which are abstractions or ideal types:

**Institutional Marriage**

Marriage as a social institution based on dutiful adherence to the time-honored marriage premise particularly the norm of permanence (Cherlin 2004; Coontz 2005b). This kind of marriage offers practical and economic security along with rewards that we often associate with custom and tradition. This marriage is organized according to the patriarchal authority requiring a wife's obedience to her husband and the kinship group.

**Companionate Marriage**

In this type of marriage both husband and wives usually adhered to sharp division of labour and they are supposed to be each other's companions-friends, lovers.

**Individualized Marriage**

Four interrelated characteristics of individualized marriage are:

1. It is optional
2. Spouses' roles are flexible ; i.e. negotiable and renegotiable
3. Its expected rewards involve love, communication, emotional intimacy
4. It exists in conjunction with a vast diversity of family forms.

Over the years, the institution of marriage has received a great deal of attention in areas of research and theory. During the 1970's alone, there were 150 articles published which examined quality of marriage (Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Polls show that both male and female spouses are far more likely than others to say that they are "very happy". Nearly two-thirds (62%) of married say they are "very happy" compared to less than half(45%) of unmarried. (Carroll 2005; Lyons 2003; Saad 2004a; Taylor, Funk and Craighill 2006).

Gottman (1979) concluded in his literature review that findings on marital satisfaction have indicated that there is no one set of variables that are characteristic of couples who report high marital satisfaction although nowadays there exist websites, books, articles which specifically mention about the qualities necessary for a healthy marriage. Practically, there is no empirical variables which have a high statistical correlation with marital quality (Gottman, 1979).

Two term that have paved their way into current literature of marriage are marital quality and marital stability. Marital stability is seen as "the formal or informal status of a marriage as intact or no intact." Unfortunately, as with earlier ideas, the term marital stability does not encompass all of the aspects of a marriage. The definition for marital stability implies that if a marriage is stable, well adjusted, etc., it is therefore good and satisfying for the couple. The term marital stability like the terms marital adjustment and marital satisfaction does not cover the entire range of what it means to have a "good" marriage. Thus, the introduction of the term "marital quality" seemed to eliminate many of the problems the earlier definitions had.

Spanier and Lewis (1976) defined marital quality as a subjective evaluation of a married couple's relationship where the range of evaluations

constitutes a continuum reflecting numerous characteristics of marital interaction and marital functioning. High marital quality, therefore, is associated with good judgement, adequate communication, a high level of marital happiness, integration, and a high degree of satisfaction with the relationship. The single greatest predictor of marital stability is marital quality

The various theories explaining marital quality are as follows:

**Cuber & Harroff (1963) Typology of Marital Quality**

An American marriage is categorized as either:

1. Conflict-habituated: This involves a great deal of fight by the couple, but is endured and possibly enjoyed.
2. Devitalized: involves little or no fighting, but also little or no passionate involvement among the couple.
3. Passive-congenial: each partner is involved as much, or more, outside of the marriage as in it.
4. Vital: the couple is highly involved with each other, but not restrictive of the other so that each may experience personal growth.
5. Total: The couples are constantly together and intensely share all mutual interests.

**Burr (1973)**

Theory of marital quality: It has been divided into three parts:

1. Premarital factors: include homogamy between possible mates, resources for marital role functioning, parental models, and support from significant others, such as parents and friends, toward the relationship.
2. Social and Economic factors: include socioeconomic status of the couple, the wife's work status, approval of the marriage by friends and relatives, and the household composition.
3. Interpersonal and Dyadic Factors: such as positive regard for their spouse, emotional gratification in the form of expressing affection, communication skills of the couple, role fit, and interaction with each other and other groups such as a church.

**Huan & Stinnett (1982)**

The theory emphasised about "comfortableness" as an essential factor of marital quality. They 6 factors necessary for relationship comfort are:

1. Empathy: trying to understand how the other feels by "putting yourself in his/her shoes."
2. Spontaneity: being able to be oneself without inhibition.
3. Trust: being able to count on the partner's being honest in the end.
4. Interest-care: being interested and interesting, cared for and caring for one's partner.
5. Respect: having a high regard for and belief in the other's right to be unique.
6. Criticalness-hostility: a negative factor showing that an individual is not respected or appreciated.

From the reviews we can understand that the single greatest predictor of marital stability is marital quality which is a multidimensional aspect that cannot

exist without its constituent parts such as satisfaction, stability and adjustment. In the current paper, the aspect of marital quality is attempted to study with reference to military marriage. Although quite a lot of research has been done with regard to defence services and families but not much has been researched upon their marital quality. Very few researches on this issue is available with regard to Indian context thus, being the rationale for the present study.

Military service refers to service offered by an individual or group in an army or militia voluntarily as a chosen job or as a result of an involuntary draft (conscription). Military marriage refers to marital relationship of couple whose one of the spouse is working in military service. According to the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC, 2006) 50% of military personnel are married; 90% of these spouses are women, greater than 50% are reserve personnel, while 7% are in dual (both spouses are military) military marriages. The NHMRC also notes that there are normal challenges that military marriages encounter even without deployment, e.g. frequent moves and separations, loss of friends due to moves, parental absences, and job losses due to a spouse's reassignment. In general, a military couple has an increased need for flexibility and adaptation due to frequent changes that occur during the marital cycle.

NHMRC (2006) reported that despite the challenges military marriages experience, married soldiers perform better and are promoted faster than those who are not married, and married soldiers are more likely to remain on active duty. Marriage increases retention in the military for men, but retention in service to the military for women is reduced if they are married.

The challenges of being married and being in the military can be deeply affected by the process of deployment. When a partner is deployed, such as in the instance of the war in Iraq, the spouse who is left behind experiences a loss of emotional support, increased responsibilities, and a major need to adjust role accountability. These changes often result in feelings of anxiety, anger, depression, and even physical illness. Likewise, the partner who is deployed will also feel anxious and depressed and often experiences guilt for being the absent spouse or parent. This study can be easily replicated to Indian context where women are primarily dependent on her husband and are submissive, tolerant despite changing role of women in the current era.

Research sponsored by the partnership of the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, Army National Guard, and Office of the Chief, Army Reserve (Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2007) supports the importance of understanding deployment as a factor in military marriage. Majority of studies (Bohannon et al. 1995; Cantos et al. 1994; Cronin 1995; Griffin and Morgan 1988; Heyman and Neidig 1999; Mc Carroll et al. 2000; Shupe et al. 1987) have found higher rates of domestic violence as compared to civilian couples.

Researcher at Kansas State University (2008) administered a quality-of-life survey to 700 U.S. Army soldiers stationed at Fort Riley, in Kansas, along with 390 of their spouses. The finding of the study suggests that the majority of married military couples currently in the service appear to be happy with the state of their relationships.

Babae, Jain, Cardona, Williams and Naghizadeh (2009) conducted an study to make an comparative evaluation of the general health and marital satisfaction among women married with veterans and non veterans in the Iraq-Iran war. The results of this study suggest that wives of Iranian veterans as compared to other women have a higher level of general health and satisfaction which is contradictory to other research findings (Jordan et.al 1992, Westerink & Giarratanol 1999 etc.).

Goff, Nelson, B. (2005) suggests that serving in combat can affect the relationship satisfaction of military couples.

#### **Research Objectives**

The research objectives of the present study are:

1. To determine the marital quality among military couples using Marital Quality Scale (MQS)
2. To determine the factors influencing marital quality (low/ high) among the military couples.

#### **Procedure of Study**

The nature of the paper primarily being theoretical, and conceptual in nature, case study of two couple in which either one of the spouse is engaged in military service was undertaken. Both the couples were married for not less than 14 years. The initials of the names of the respondents will be used for the current study in order to ensure anonymity of respondent:

#### **Couple 1**

Male named A.C, 35 year old and the female named P.D, 32 year old.

#### **Couple 2**

Male named L.C,38 year old and the female named M.D' 36 year old.

#### **Tools Used**

In order to assess marital quality, Marital Quality Scale (MQS) developed by Anisha Shah in 1995 was used. This scale was developed and standardised on Indian population and issues like marriage relationships has a distinct culture-specific component. The scale has high internal consistency (coefficient alpha = 0.91) and high test-retest reliability ( $r = 0.83$  over a 6 weeks interval). It has well established content and constructs validity. The scale was administered to both the spouses via mail which was followed by telephonic interview using an unstructured interview schedule. Although the method used for collecting the data had its own limitations. But looking at the availability, accessibility to such population and also for researchers' convenience this method was used in the present study.

#### **Results of Study**

The data obtained from Marital Quality Scale was analysed using the standardised procedure and the following scores were obtained for both the couple. The scores of MQS are tabulated below:

**Table 1**  
**Table Representing Marital Quality of Couple 1**

Name	Raw Score	Interpretation of MQS
Husband	120	Low
Wife	125	Low

**Table 2**  
**Table Representing Marital Quality of Couple 2**

Name	Raw Score	Interpretation
Husband	127	Low
Wife	120	Low

Scores mentioned above in table 1 & 2 indicates that both the couples scored low in terms of marital quality score. The scores are in the range of 120-127 among the couples. Gender difference was not evident in the scores obtained by the respondent of the current study. i.e. it was not only the females experiencing more of unsatisfactory relationship than the males which is quite contradictory to our normal perception of women's societal emotional process in general. Comparing the score of both the male it can be seen that couple 1 male scored 120 whereas for couple 2 male scored 127, both clearly indicating low marital quality score.

In order to determine the various reasons attributing to low marital quality among both the couples, an telephonic interview was conducted. The data gathered through the interview were analysed with the help of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The 8 themes that were identified from the data that were characteristic of low marital quality are as follows:

#### **Low Satisfaction In Sexual and Security Relationship**

Both the couples were found to be not satisfied in their sexual relationship. Female respondents very hesitatingly reported that they hardly get to stay together with their husband. Even the husbands reported that although they want to enjoy being intimate with their wives but their nature of job doesn't permit them to stay together. For instance one of the husband is posted in the Patankot regimen in Punjab and the other one is posted in Bacarakot regimen in West Bengal and the area of their posting is terror prone area so can't even afford to take their family along with them.

#### **Poor Communication**

Communication is the most essential aspect of any relationship. Especially in terms of married life communication among both the spouse is vital in ensuring quality of the relationship. The couples mentioned that they hardly get time to talk to each other on a daily basis i.e. they speak to each other twice in a week. Research makes it clear that the expression of positive feelings is critical to a marital and family happiness (Gottman & Levenson 2000; Roberts 2000).

#### **Unfulfilled Needs for Affection**

Affection towards spouse should be positive. A relationship which lacks affection suffers in quality as the feeling of love, warmth, care, empathy, support seems to be missing. In married life affection keeps the relationship alive and makes the journey of life beautiful. In the present study, since proximity to partner is less due to the nature of job, posting. This

impairs the relationship as there is a feeling of loneliness, despair, lack of support. Need for love, security is essential need of human being and since these needs are not fulfilled it remains ungratified. Both the female respondent reported during the interview the same agony and pain experienced as "There are times, when I need my husband near me, but unfortunately I do not find him beside me".

#### **Low Trust**

Trust was found to be very low among both the couples. For instance one of the female respondents mentioned that her husband doesn't trust her and doesn't believe her "usually". Female respondents said that there are a lot of misunderstandings between us. My husband does sometimes asks me questions like "Are you developing an interest towards any other man since I am not able to give you company always and also when you need help."

#### **Diffusion of Responsibility**

Female respondents of both the couple revealed that they face lot of difficulty in diffusion of responsibility as they stayed separately. Managing household chores and domestic affairs along with raising children all alone becomes difficult. Ultimately it leads to stress, worry, physical complaints.

#### **Exclusion of Spouse from Decision-Making Process**

Absence of spouse in decision-making process is another challenge faced by both the female respondent. One of the respondent commented that "I need to perform the duty of husband, father, mother, daughter-in-law in my family which is quite challenging to handle". This results in stress, frustration, anger outburst, headache etc.

#### **Dominance**

Being dominant on partner was found to be prominent in the two couples relationship. The wife reported this more than the husbands did. One of the wife said that "My husband tries to show off his power always on me as if it is his battleground where all his soldiers follows him."

#### **Thought of Regret**

Feeling of regret persists among the couples about the relationship. This is another indicator of the poor quality of marital relationship. One of the female respondent mentioned "I feel it was a mistake to marry him. I regret my decision".

The scores obtained on the marital quality scale and themes derived clearly indicate that the respondents of the present study were not very happy with the way their marital relationship is progressing. Both the couples are not happy with their quality of marriage although the time for the marriage is quite long. Findings of the present study is supported with Goff, Nelson, B. (2005) research which suggests that serving in combat can affect the relationship satisfaction of military couples. Research shows that marital stability and satisfaction among military couples are low due to the nature of work they are engaged in.

Research findings contradictory to the results obtained in the present study states that marital quality increases in the later years of marriage. On

average older couples report having fewer disagreements, marital happiness often increase in later life when couples have the time, energy and financial resources to invest in their couple relationship (Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004). Even research is suggesting that marital quality has declined against 2 generations, i.e. younger and older cohort due to the changes in social and economic context of marriage. (Rogers, S.J., & Amato, P, R. 1997).

#### **Conclusion**

From the above findings and the researches reviewed it is clear that marital disharmony in a military marriage is low and is well brought out in the form of lack of understanding in the marital unit, feeling of greater rejection from spouse, lower degree of satisfaction in sexual and security needs, unfulfilled need of affection contributing to lack of concern and unhappiness, feeling of despair due to helplessness and regret about the relationship, exclusion of spouse from the decision-making process, inability to obtain spouse's trust and have inadequate role functioning. In discord unhealthy role functioning, values of one partner affect the marriage negatively leading to marital distress. The finding of this paper although can't be generalised since the sample chosen was very small. Findings were contradictory as compared to researches telling that marital life of military couples are satisfactory. Marital quality of military couples are for sure affected at some point of time. Thus, adaptability and flexibility needs to be incorporated in military marriages in order to last for long. A marriage to be high in quality, needs to be high in adjustment, satisfaction, and stability. Without these ingredients, marital quality does not exist.

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