

Believing Disagreement as Destructive: A Cognitive Predictor of Marital Quality

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the study: Marital quality is influenced by several factors which makes a married couple vulnerable to marital conflicts. Dysfunctional relationship belief that disagreement is destructive shapes marital relationship among married couples. This study aims to assess disagreement is destructive as a predictor of marital quality, and their association among husbands and wives in Pakistan.

Methodology: A cross-sectional study was conducted with N= 350 married individuals (N= 175 married couples) selected using purposive sampling. The Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI) and Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) were administered to assess the belief that disagreement is destructive and marital quality respectively among married couples.

Findings: The findings from this study suggest that there is a negative relationship between the belief that disagreement is destructive and marital quality among married couples. Furthermore, the belief that disagreement is destructive emerged as negative predictor of marital quality for both husbands and wives.

Conclusion: The results from this study highlight the detrimental effect of holding maladaptive beliefs of disagreement is destructive related to marital relationship and how its impacts marital quality. Thus, this study provides basis for devising therapeutic interventions to resolve marital conflicts and improve marital quality by indulging in open communication among married couples.

Keywords: Married Couples, Disagreement, Marital Quality, Marital Conflict.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Marital quality is shaped by multiple factors such as communication patterns, personality traits, relationship beliefs and external stressors (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; 2000). Marital relationships are molded over the time by the beliefs they hold related to the relationship as well as their partners. Cognitive theories emphasize on irrational beliefs related to marriage, specifically the belief that disagreement is inherently destructive, which negatively impacts marital relationship (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982).

Married individuals who have the belief that disagreement is destructive in a relationship lowers marital quality. Cramer (2004) revealed through an experimental study that individuals who have irrational

beliefs that disagreement is destructive were found to have low marital satisfaction in comparison with married individuals believing that disagreement can be managed and can occur in a relationship (Mehr et al., 2022). Another study by Cramer (2015) found that holding the belief that disagreement is destructive has a negative emotional impact on a married couple.

Eidelson and Epstein (1982) developed the Relationship Belief Inventory and found that married individuals with the belief that disagreement is destructive have poorer marital satisfaction and adjustment as compared to other married individuals. Moreover, destructive interpretations of conflict are linked with negative conflict behaviors related to marriage including criticism and hostility which reduces marital quality (Gottman et al., 1998). On contrary, constructive conflict which means disagreement is assumed to be solvable is associated with better marital outcomes and healthier communication among the couples (Gottman et al., 1998).

Research suggests that destructive conflict processes such as marital tension, disagreements and destructive conflict strategies are negatively related to marital well-being (McCoy et al., 2009). Thus, married individuals viewing disagreements as harmful are more likely to indulge in maladaptive conflict strategies and conflict resolution patterns. Furthermore, irrational relationship beliefs are linked with lower quality of life and psychological distress, indirectly influencing marital satisfaction (Višlā et al., 2016; Gulzar et al., 2024). Hence, these beliefs can increase emotional reactions which makes conflict resolution more difficult for married couples (Möller & de Beer, 1998; Epstein et al., 1979).

Research highlights the role of disagreement in relationship in increasing marital conflict (Tasew & Getahun, 2021). Moreover, marital conflict is linked with physiological negatively impacts including inflammatory concerns, along with psychological impacts and reduced marital well-being (Wilson et al., 2024). Therefore, research suggests that negative views related to disagreement in the relationship heightens stress responses, in turn reducing marital quality.

Marital relationships are as interactions in married couples with differences in expectations from the partner and opinions. It is important to understand how couples perceive and cope with the differences and disagreements in the marital relationship (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). As maladaptive cognitive beliefs such as disagreement is destructive restrains couples from open conversation, increases avoidance of conflicts and relational tension, so it is important to determine its impact on marital quality of married couples (Markman et al., 2010). Although empirical evidence emphasizes suggest the significance of conflict resolution in determining marital quality, however there is a lack of quantitative evidence on how disagreement is destructive belief is inherently detrimental for marital quality among married couples. Therefore, the strength and direction of the link between disagreement is destructive belief and marital quality remains underexplored.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The vulnerability stress model highlights that persistent intrapersonal vulnerability factors such as dysfunctional relationship beliefs act together with environmental stressors which influences relationship outcomes such as marital satisfaction and marital quality (Fincham & Beach, 2010). Mentser and Sagiv (2025) suggested that personal beliefs and values related with marriage are associated with marital stability and has been found to predict marital outcomes, mainly divorce. This signifies the influence of internal belief systems related to marriage in shaping marital quality.

The present study aims to investigate the association of the dysfunctional relationship belief that disagreement is destructive with marital quality, disagreement is destructive as a predictor of marital quality among married couples in Pakistan. Marital beliefs shape the relationship dynamics and play a vital role in determining marital outcomes. Therefore, it is important to identify the dysfunctional relationship beliefs related to marital quality, and how they contribute to married couples' marital well-being. There is scarce literature on the relationship belief that disagreement is destructive as predictor of marital quality, and especially in Pakistan's context. Thus, the findings of this study will contribute to a

more objective perspective of maladaptive marital beliefs on marital relationships and will offer insights related to evidence-based interventions to enhance marital functioning. This study hypothesizes that there will be negative relationship between disagreement is destructive and marital quality, and disagreements is destructive negatively predicts marital quality among married couples.

3. METHODS

A cross-sectional research design was used to assess the objectives of this study. A sample of 350 married individuals (N= 175 couples) was recruited using purposive sampling technique.

3.1 Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample was recruited from community settings in the form of married couples. These married couples were selected using purposive sampling techniques. Married couples with a least one child, living together without any physical or mental illness were included in this study. Those married individuals who were living separately were excluded during recruitment process. Both husbands and wives were enrolled in this study. Most of the participants were graduated and living in a nuclear family system. Table 1 represents the demographic characteristics of both husbands and wives.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Married Couples (N= 350)

	<i>Husband (N=175)</i>				<i>Wife (N=175)</i>			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Year of marriage	6.55	4.74						
Age	34.40	5.82			30.86	6.02		
Birth order								
Eldest			24	13.7			45	25.7
Middle			85	48.6			56	32
Youngest			43	24.6			43	24.6
Only child			23	13.1			31	13.1

3.2 Instruments

The Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI) was used to measure dysfunctional relationship beliefs and Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) assessed marital quality in this study.

3.2.1 The Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI)

Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982) is comprised of five subscales, but Disagreement is Destructive subscale was used which consists of 8 items. Two items are reverse coded in disagreement is destructive subscale. The response rate is 6-point Likert scale with range from 5 (I strongly believe that the statement is true) to 0 (I strongly believe that the statement is false). A high score on disagreement is destructive subscale indicates higher dysfunctional belief about disagreement as destructive for relationship.

3.2.2 Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS)

Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) by Busby et al. (1995) was used which consists of 14 items. Marital satisfaction, consensus and cohesion are assessed by RDAS. The response rate of this scale is from 5 to 6 point Likert scale. The sum of all the items on RDAS corresponds to the total score on RDAS with high score implying higher marital quality.

3.3 Procedure

The current study was approved by Institution Review Board and the permission to use both scales was sought from the respective authors. Participants filled the questionnaire both in-person and online, and both husbands and wives filled the questionnaires. Firstly, the information about this research was

disseminated and participants contacted the researcher. Married couples voluntarily participants by given written consent to participate in this study. Participants had the right to withdraw from taking part in this study. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was ensured throughout the research process.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data was analysis on SPSS version 26. Data cleaning and screening was conducted and the data was normally distribution with skewness and kurtosis within the range. Internal consistency of instruments was calculated using Cronbach’s alpha. Pearson correlation and linear regression were conducted to determine the association of disagreement is destructive with marital quality among married couples. Main analyses were conducted for both husbands and wives.

4. Results

Prior to conducting main analysis, preliminary analysis was conducted which indicated that the data is normally distributed and is skewness and kurtosis are within the range. Reliability of the assessment measures was determined through Cronbach alpha coefficient. The internal consistency of both disagreement is destructive subscale of Relationship Belief Inventory (RBI) and Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) were within acceptable range. The alpha reliabilities of both scales are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Alpha Reliability of Instruments

Scale	<i>k</i>	Alpha reliability
Disagreement is Destructive (Husbands)	8	.77
Disagreement is Destructive (Wives)	8	.78
Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Husbands)	14	.58
Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Wives)	14	.56

Pearson correlation was employed to determine the relationship between disagreement is destructive and marital quality for husbands and wives. Table 3 represents the correlation results for married couples.

Table 3: Correlation between Disagreement is Destructive and Marital Quality among Married Couples (*N*= 350)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1 Disagreement is destructive (Husbands)	20.70	7.42	-	-.18*	.52**	-.19*
2 Martial quality (Husbands)	39.01	7.99		-	-.15*	.76**
3 Disagreement is destructive (Wives)	21.09	7.74			-	-.22**
4 Martial quality (Wives)	38.79	8.59				-

Note. **p* < .05; ***p*<.01.

The results of correlation indicate that the belief that disagreement is destructive is negatively related with marital quality among husbands (*r*= -.18, *p*<.05) and wives (*r*= -.22, *p*= .00). This suggests that having more beliefs that disagreement is destructive is related to lower marital quality among married couples.

Linear regression was conducted to assess disagreement as destructive as predictor of marital quality for both husbands and wives. The results for regression are displayed in Table 4 for husbands.

Table 4: Disagreement is Destructive as Predictors of Marital Quality among Husbands (N= 175)

IV	B	S.E	β	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Constant	43.24	1.76		39.75	46.73
Disagreement is destructive	-.20*	.08	-.18	-.36	-.04
R	.18				
R ²	.03				
F	6.43*				

Note. *p < .05; **p<.01.

Linear regression suggests that the belief that disagreement is destructive negatively predicts marital quality among husbands ($B= -.20, p<.05$) which explains 18% variance in marital quality among husbands. Thus, one unit increase in the belief that disagreement is destructive, there is one unit increase in marital quality of husbands.

Table 5 represents the belief that disagreement is destructive as predictor of marital quality among wives.

Table 5: Disagreement is Destructive as Predictors of Marital Quality among Wives (N= 175)

IV	B	S.E	β	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Constant	43.93	1.84		40.28	47.57
Disagreement is destructive	-.24**	.08	-.22	-.40	-.08
R	.22				
R ²	.04				
F	8.75**				

Note. *p < .05; **p<.01.

The results of linear regression revealed that disagreement is destructive emerged as negative predictor of marital quality ($B= -.24, p= .00$), explaining 22% variance in marital quality. For each unit increase in the belief that disagreement is destructive, there is one unit decrease in marital quality among wives.

5. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the association between belief that disagreement is destructive and marital quality among husbands and wives. Previous literature on dysfunctional relationship beliefs focuses on the belief that disagreement is inherently destructive for relationship is associated with lower marital quality (Cramer, 2004). The findings from the present study that there is negative association between disagreement is destructive and marital quality is consistent with literature. Moreover, cognitive perspectives on relationships (Ellis, 1962) further validate these results that married individuals having perspective that maladaptive conflict is always harmful for a relationship have poor marital quality as these married individuals interpret normal disagreements and conflicts as failure in the marital relationship.

Positive beliefs such as thinking that love grows with effort in a relationship have lower decline in marital satisfaction as compared to others. So, married individuals who are more satisfied with their partners have stronger beliefs about growth of their relationship. This increases happiness in a couple for long period of time (Gander et al., 2025). The findings from this study extend literature on negative beliefs that the disagreement does not itself is an issue rather viewing disagreement as a threat to relationship negatively impacts marital quality (Víšlã et al., 2016; Gulzar et al., 2024).

The present study found that the belief that disagreement is destructive is a negative predictor of marital quality for both husbands and wives, which aligns with the empirical literature. Individuals who perceive conflict as destructive may respond with anxiety, avoidance, or dissatisfaction, thereby reducing overall

relationship quality. In contrast, those who view disagreement as a normal and manageable aspect of relationships tend to maintain higher satisfaction. This aligns with broader evidence indicating that destructive conflict patterns and negative interpretations of conflict are associated with poorer marital well-being (Eidelson and Epstein, 1982; Epstein et al., 1979). The Relationship Beliefs Model (Ellis, 1962) emphasizes on cognitive aspect and the negative impact of belief related to marriage on marital quality which is also consistent with the results from present study. Therefore, these interpretations related to dysfunctional beliefs heighten emotional responses and increase marital conflict, leading to lower marital quality.

Baucom and Epstein (1990) explained through relationship belief therapy that unrealistic expectations including the perception that disagreement is always destructive for the relationship leads to relationship distress. Moreover, Gottman (1994) found that married couples interpreting that disagreements are innately harmful engage more in destructive behaviors in marriage including criticism and marital conflict, which is linked with reduced marital quality. The theoretical and empirical evidence are congruent with the findings from the present study that disagreement is destructive belief in a marital relationship is correlated with marital quality, and also positively predicts marital quality in both husbands and wives.

5.1 Limitations and Recommendations

Even though the present study sheds light on the link between dysfunctional relationship belief of disagreement is destructive and marital quality, however there are certain limitations which are acknowledged. Firstly, this was a cross-sectional study and data was collected at one point in time. Future researchers can use longitudinal research design to assess this relationship. Secondly, purposive sampling was used which limits the generalizability of these results. Further research can use probability sample techniques to recruit participants and enhance generalizability of findings. Moreover, there can be effect of social desirability bias such that participants might have underreported their marital concerns as they filled the questionnaires in pair.

5.2 Implications

The findings from this study highlight significant clinical, theoretical and practical implications for understanding relationship dynamics in a marriage. Theoretically this study adds to the literature by emphasizing on psychological factors influencing marital quality among married couples. Thus, this study adds to literature by building on Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT). From clinical perspective, the findings focus on the significance of dysfunctional beliefs and provide insights for marriage counselors, mental health professionals, and family therapists to focus on dysfunctional and maladaptive relationship beliefs. Couple therapy can benefit from working on these beliefs and improving relationship quality. In community settings, programs can be developed to focus on identifying and altering maladaptive beliefs among married couples. Moreover, premarital counseling can be conducted to prevent marital conflict in future and increase marital well-being.

6. CONCLUSION

The current study signifies the role of dysfunctional relationship belief of disagreement is destructive in shaping marital quality. The results highlight that individuals endorsing maladaptive beliefs that disagreement is destructive is associated with lower levels of marital quality. These beliefs have an impact of each partner views their relationship and responds to conflicts, contributing to emotional distress. Thus, this study is consistent with cognitive-behavioral perspective on relationship that how dysfunctional beliefs and cognitive processes can influence relationships.

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Conflict of Interest

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