

## Depression and Marital Distress: Assessing the Predictive Role of Narcissistic Features

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### Abstract



*The present study focused on investigating the predictive role of narcissistic features concerning marital distress and depressive symptomology. Sample of the study comprised two hundred diagnosed depressive married individuals (N=200). Data was obtained from conveniently selected diagnosed depressed females (n= 108) and males (n= 92) from public and Government sector hospitals and clinics in Mansehra, Abbottabad, and Islamabad cities. The Urdu version of the Marital Quality scale and Narcissistic Vampire checklist was used to assess narcissistic features and marital distress. Results revealed that narcissistic features significantly predicted marital distress among individuals with depression. Similarly, gender differences revealed that females had more narcissistic features and displayed more marital distress as compared to males. Moreover, depressive patients with a longer duration of courtship exhibited more marital distress feelings and attitudes toward their partners. The current study result will be helpful to couple/family therapists and clinicians in planning and dealing with marital distress and related psychological issues among individuals with depression.*

**Keywords:** Depression, Marital distress, Narcissism, Courtship.

### Introduction

Narcissism and depression are usually considered to be strongly associated as individuals with narcissistic features cannot value and respect others' feelings. Narcissistic features and depression therefore may lead to marital distress and related problems. The marital adjustment has always been rated the highest regarding marital incongruity, shattered partnership, and diminished intimacy and trust.

Depression can influence an individual's thoughts, feelings, actions, and sense of well-being, and feel usually unenthusiastic and alienated from the world. The individual might be vacillating and have a faulty mental functioning and native self-image (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual [DSM-IV-TR], 2000).

Furthermore, depressives are proven to be non-compliant with the demands of social relations. This is probably because of their incapability to determine or keep intimate social relationships and contacts (World Health Organization [WHO], 2012) Narcissism is also coupled with some additional faulty traits. Individuals with narcissistic personality features can be impetuous, and offensively self-assuring with high impulsivity (Campbell et al., 2007). Narcissists themselves are highly self-centered which in turn results in denying personal mistakes and flaws (Robins & Beer, 2001). Narcissists are high in pleasure-seeking but are also inconsiderate towards others (Ruiz et al., 2001). This suggests that comparatively, they have a high need for power but a low need for close relationships. Self-centered

### Marital Distress. Nature and definition

Marital distress is a state he states in which both husband and wife has non- satisfactory experience with their relationship and with the partner's behavior and prescribed roles (Simonsen, & Simonsen, 2011). Marital distress explains the extent to which partners have mental non-compatibility, dissatisfaction with the relationship, and inability to resolve personal conflicts considering their feelings and others' viewpoint. (Bradbury & Karney, 2004). Maladjustment in marriage is directly associated with problematic personality features (Herr et al., 2007). Studies have proved that a strong relationship exists between marital distress and depression (Maroufizadeh, 2018). It is that individuals

with depressed moods were also low in context to their marital adjustment. (Ruiz-Marin, 2021). The connection between marital satisfaction and depressive mood is further strengthened by the study results suggesting that a reported higher level of maladjustment is observed especially when female partners reported depressive symptoms (Li, 2018). Furthermore, the research studies have mentioned that there is an interactional link exists between depressive symptomology and marital distress, the severity of depressive symptoms is negatively affected by the level of marital mal-satisfaction (Lamela et al., 2020)

Narcissism is a personality construct and is viewed as a personality disorder, that is, narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). People with narcissistic features have inflated self-beliefs and an overly positive self-concept as well as egotism (Hart et al., 2022). Narcissists have definite self-centered goals that interpersonal relations can accomplish (Ok et al., 2021). Narcissism is regarded as extravagant, grandiose self-concept (Mück, 2022).

In the present study, marital distress in association with narcissistic features is explored among individuals with depression. Studies have shown that interpersonally narcissists are impartial and low in responsiveness (Kealy et al., 2021).

Analyzing narcissism in relation to emotional effects it is found that narcissistic individuals have a predisposition to be highly aggressive, violent, and torturing towards their mate (Green & Charles, 2019). Violent and negative interactive relations were observed among narcissistic individuals (Burton, & Hoobler, 2011). Narcissism is a multi-dimensional aspect of personality comprised of, grandiose feelings and self-centeredness. Narcissistic prerequisites and the egoistic approach of the partners even have been found a major source of marital maladjustment investigators claimed that interpersonal problems are accompanied by narcissism. A narcissistic personality is associated with anger or paranoid ideas.

The present study's aim was aimed at examining the impact of narcissistic features on marital distress among depressives. The findings of the present study may deliver new evidence for the significance of marital adjustment in association with narcissistic features among depressives. Marital distress significantly affects narcissistic features, especially among individuals with depression symptoms, but this element is remained unchecked and ignored, the present study intends to highlight this element and to provide assistance to other psychological health professionals such as psychologists and clinicians the most notably the life partners to deal with their partner's narcissistic personality features.

## **Method**

A survey research design was used to explore the impact of narcissistic features on experienced marital adjustment by dysthymic patients. A sample of 200 diagnosed with depression (male = 92, female  $n = 108$ ) was purposively selected from different hospitals in Abbottabad, Mansehra, and Haripur cities. The sample was further divided and grouped on the bases of courtship (i.e., short courtship > 13years, longer courtship < 13 years). Married and clinically diagnosed depressive patients willing to participate were only included in the current study. Two measures named Narcissistic vampire checklist (NVC; Bernstein, 2007) and Marital Quality Scale (MQS; Shah, 1995) were used to measure narcissistic features and marital distress respectively.

### **Narcissistic vampire Scale.**

The narcissistic vampire checklist (NVC; Bernstein, 2007) was used to measure the narcissistic personality dimensions. It comprises 20 items with 2 response categories (i.e., yes or no) 22 with reliability = 0.50. Participants were directed to answer each item on a yes or no format. Scores range from 0 to 1. 0 for no and 1 for yes. At the end of each section, add up the scores. The calculated score is our total score.

**Marital Quality Scale (MQS).** This is a multidimensional self-report scale consisting of 50 items rated on a 4-point rating scale used to assess marital distress (Shah, 1995). This scale yields a total score on marital quality and subscale scores on 12 relationship dimensions. The range of total scores is 50 to 200. Higher scores indicate poorer quality of marital life. A cutoff score of 80 has been used to discriminate between distressed and non-distressed couples. The author reports an internal consistency of 0.91 and test-retest reliability of 0.83.

## **Results**

There were 114(57%) courtships with less than 13 years of courtship, and 86(43%) with courtship for more than 13 years. The mean age of the participants was  $28 \pm 1.87$  years with the age range of 25–55

years. Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of participants in different categories of courtship and gender.

In Table 2 depicts significant relationship between narcissism (predicator) and marital distress (dependent variable) ( $\beta = .33$ ,  $t = 4.68$ ,  $p = .000$ ) where the former explained about 9.5% variance in the later ( $\Delta R^2 = .095$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 198) = 23.919$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

Table 3 portrays non-significant courtship base differences on the narcissistic vampire checklist, whereas reported differences were significant on the marital quality scale. Study results reveals that diagnosed depressed patients with longer duration of marital relationship were maritally less adjusted and displayed distressed felling than depressed patients with shorter courtship.

Table 4 depicts significant gender base differences among depressed patients regarding marital distress and narcissistic features. Female patients with depression showed more narcissistic traits than male patients who in-tern were more martially distressed than males.

**Table 1**

*Demographic characteristics of participants*

Courtship	Male (n=92)	Female (n=108)	f (%)
>13 years	53	61	114 (57 %)
< 13 years	39	47	86(43%)

**Table 2**

*Predictors of Marital distress (N= 200)*

Variable	Simple linear regression				
	B	SE(B)	B	T	P
NVC	.31	.06	.33	4.68	.000

Note.  $R^2 = .095$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 3**

*Comparison between depressive patients with long and short courtship on the Marital Quality Scale (MQS) and Narcissistic Vampire Checklist (NVC; N=200)*

Courtship									
Scales	Long (n=114)		Short (n=86)		<i>t</i> (198)	<i>P</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		<i>Cohen's D</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
NVC	35.05	2.69	35.59	3.18	1.24	.268	-0.76	0.40	0.18
MOS	16.93	2.94	15.51	4.58	2.48	.000	-0.27	1.19	0.36

Note. MAQ = Marital Adjustment Questionnaire; NVC = Narcissistic Vampire Checklist.

\*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 4**

*Comparison between male and female patients with depression on the Marital Quality Scale (MQS) and Narcissistic Vampire Checklist (NVC; N=200)*

Gender									
Scales	Female ( <i>n</i> =108)		Male ( <i>n</i> =92)		<i>t</i> (198)	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		Cohen's <i>D</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
MQS	18.40	3.01	17.12	4.14	2.46	.015	-0.16	1.62	.078
NVC	35.76	2.57	34.90	3.22	2.05	.041	-0.96	0.19	0.31

Note. MQS = Marital Quality Scale; NVC = Narcissistic Vampire checklist.

\*\* $p < .01$

## Discussion

The present study reveals that narcissism is a significant predictor of marital distress among couples with depression suggesting that couples with higher levels of narcissistic personality features were experiencing more marital distress. These study results are in line with previous research reporting that distress in the marital relationship is strongly associated with narcissistic features (Miller & Campbell, 2008).

According to gender base differences, female patients with depression exhibited more narcissistic characteristics and were more martially distressed as compared to male dysthymic patients (Hamel, 2013). Past research has suggested depression to be strongly associated with marital

maladjustment. Female partners with narcissism reported a lower level of marital satisfaction (Casale et al., 2020).

Regarding time, they spent in marital relation study revealed that study subjects with long courtships had less narcissistic traits and were more maritally adjusted (Hou, Jiang, & Wang, 2019). These results are in line with the findings of research suggesting that the duration of time spent together have a significant impact on marital adjustment (Skowron, 2000).

### **Conclusion**

The present study overall proved the strong impact of narcissistic features on experienced marital distress among depressives. Female partners were more maritally distressed. Based on the study results it is safe to conclude that life partners with longer courtship are more maritally distressed. Similarly, narcissism significantly positively predicts marital distress among individuals with depression

### **Recommendation**

This study suggests that family therapists should consider the impact of narcissistic features in suggesting therapeutic techniques. Furthermore, they must provide helthy and effective self–help tips and techniques to improve their marital relationship.

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