Marital Status and Socio-Psychological Identity: A Discourse Analysis of Unmarried Men and Women's Experiences in Pakistan

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Abstract
This research aims to address a crucial problem of Pakistani society's behavior towards unmarried men and women. The research aims to investigate un-married men and women's problems they faced while living in a society. The research problem is that society is hostile towards their acceptance, as a result, unmarried men and women face social identity issues and rejection. Society, including close family members, makes them a source of shame and guilty of not getting married. The data is collected from more than 200 unmarried men and women ages 25 to 40 on their social identity threats to analyze that what type of identity threats they face, and how they cop them. They reported discourse indicates that they must cope with the situation to save their face. The study also reveals that women suffer more than men. The data is collected through semi-structured interviews and group discussion sessions. The collected data was later classified into sections and themes were allocated by using NVivo software (1.7.2). Tajfel and Turner 's (1979) Social Identity Threat Theory (SITT) was employed as a lens to analyze the collected data. The research reveals that social acceptance and reforms may be a reason to reduce stress levels among them. The research is significant as it has added a social value and informed the social policymakers to take necessary actions for social awareness for the acceptance of unmarried men and women. The study recommends that in the future, reasons for staying un-married may be investigated to bring harmony. Marriage arrangements should be made at the national level so that a peaceful society may come into being.
Key words: Social Identity Threat Theory (SITT), Empowerment, Social awareness, Un-married men and women.

Introduction

The institute of marriage contains varying degrees of validity. The cultures of Pakistan do not accept the decisions or will of people for not getting married but in a country like Pakistan this phenomenon is judged through the eyes of society, that people decide whether one has to marry

to whom and when. Those who go against societal rules have to face a lot of criticism and rejection. People usually get married to avoid social pressure. There is a lot of pressure on unmarried people, that to be unmarried at the age of marrying lets people face criticism. This criticism is faced not only from surroundings but from home as well. This pressure leaves an indelible mark on their mental health as well as strains on their well-being. They, as single, face social rejection, marginalization, and stigma and frequently face difficulties like anxiety, despair, and exclusion from respected social circles (Shah, 2017; Khan, 2020; Ahmed et al., 2022). At workplaces, they have to face judgements, and sometimes time lets them settle down in seclusion and makes them introverts to avoid social pressure. Sometime, under pressure, they have to quit their jobs and have to face financial instability. In a research conducted by Khan (2020), who claimed, that in Pakistan, an unmarried woman faces a not worthy challenge of anxiety, despair, and depression as compared to married woman. Another research conducted by Zaidi and Shahnawaz (2019), claimed that single people live a life under pressure and as a result, they spend life with feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem unless they get married. This research body focuses on and highlights the issues of Pakistani unmarried people, especially, their social identity threats out of many issues. This intricate problem is sorted out by examining the lives of single men and women, regarding the identity issues they face. This study gets views of men and women and compares the out of two who are the more sufferers at the hands of society on being singles. Though a lot of research work has already been done on the same issue but this research is going to add a new perspective on identity issues and sort out the issue by applying identity threat theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This research has added significant value to the existing body of research by adding a new perspective. The results of the study are significant for professionals of mental health, psychologists, legislators, social workers, and for common Pakistan's populace. The study suggests that for common people the awareness may bring tremendous change in society. Their acceptance of unmarried couples as social members as normal human beings' may bring calm and lessen the identity issues in the lives of unmarried men and women. This research is a sequel to existing research by (Zaidi & Shah Nawaz, 2019; Hussain et al., 2022). They worked on coping strategies of unmarried men and women and the social identity threats they face while living among married people.

Problem Statement

Unmarried people have to experience a lot of criticism and identity crises. This stigma adversely affects their mental health and well-being. A research gap exists to know the situations that how they handle when come across married people and when they cut criticism and put them in a social strata lower to them. The identity crisis issues need to be investigated. These complicated issues are prevailing yet and it's addressable. This gap needs to be filled so that unmarried people may live a peaceful life and cope up the challenges regarding identity crisis while living in Pakistan.

Aims of the Research

This research attempts to understand social identity threats experienced by um-married or singles in Pakistan. This research also aims to look for similarities and differences among unmarried men and women so far the identity crises are concerned. The main goal of the research is to add to the existing body of research, the perspective of social identity threats of unmarried people, especially in the context of Pakistani Culture.

Research Objectives

- To explore the unmarried people's responses on identity risks and strategies they made to avoid them.

- To distinguish commonalities and differences in social identity threats experiences between men and women.

Revised Research Questions

RQ1. What type of strategies Pakistani single men and women apply and manage when they face with identity threats?

RQ2. At what levels un-married men and women differ and similar in terms of social identity threats and handling those threats?

Significance of the Research

This research has added new knowledge to the existing body of research. This research focuses on social issues faced by single men and women and adds value by exploring the outcomes and suggesting new social trends to save such people from judgements, biasness, and maltreatment. This research is also beneficial for the doctors of mental health (psychologists) and for sociologists as well. This research is also beneficial for policymakers to encourage them to amend public policies associated with single status and spread awareness among common people. Their mission could be to let people live a self-decision-based life.

Literature Review

A lot of research has already been done on Pakistani society's hostility towards single human being. This resulted in a lot of complicated and multidimensional problems for unmarried people. (Shah, 2017; Khan, 2020). In the culture of Pakistan, marriage is widely expected as cultural norms that need to be accepted as social norms (Mumtaz & Salway, 2009; Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). To get thorough knowledge on the problem of unmarried men and women, this research fills the gap by synthesizing a body of previous knowledge on social expectations, unmarried people's experience, and mental health issues.

Societal Expectations around Marriage and Family

In Pakistan, individuals are strongly embedded and influenced by the social norms and adhere to the system of marriage and family. Family and social circle play milestones in decision–making and choice of marriage (Shah, 2017). The same families and social norms bring shame to unmarried people if they do not get married at the age of getting married. If a person decides not to get married due to some financial, physical, social, or mental issues, that person has to bear the consequences in the form of rejection, social shame, and criticism on being not to fit the social circle. This led to marginalization and that person considered him/ herself no more a part of the society where born, lived, and will die (Khan, 2020; Ali & Malik, 2022).

Since, in a country like Pakistan, social status or economic position matters a lot and plays a significant role in people's life, as economic position decides whether a man or woman will get married or not. Society does not accept a less economical person as well suited for marrying. As well as social cost and strata of the family matters too. Many people stay unmarried on account of belonging to a lower strata and low income. Mumtaz and Salway (2009) claimed that the institution of marriage is a cultural and social landmark and the decision to marry is greatly relevant to social status, economy, strata, and decisions of elderly family members. If a situation is favorable, a person has to marry as per the decisions of the elders and rejection may cause a rebellious attitude. It is said that these societal expectations are united with cultural, religious, and traditional norms where family honor and reputation are taken as priority. No one dares to

disobey the rules (Zaidi & Shuraydi, 2002). In a case, or a family if someone is left unmarried, he/she has to face social shame, social pressure, and marginalization and that person has to get married as per the norms of society to remove such blame and stigmas (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021; Riaz & Kamal, 2022). One of the studies reports that these people are as sad and introverts and suffer from loneliness as even family and friends make them aloof and cut their social circle short (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021). Another research emphasizes the need for a comprehensive understanding of this intricate issue of social aspects prevailing in Pakistan (Shah, 2022).

The institute of marriage is highly attached to family values, loyalty, and commitments. These social attributes have a direct relation to personal decisions. One cannot decide as to whom he or she wants to marry. It would be considered a rebellious act and disobedience. Thus, to fit in the society and be a respectful person one has to obey those family values (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021). The traditional cultural rules that view marriage as a social duty put a lot of pressure on individuals to get married on time and as per family choice. They added that such rules are harsher and tougher for women, for women the denial is impossible and if ever they dare they have to face criticism and sometimes they have to face unbearable consequences, in the form of live burn, murder, and not allow to meet family member gain in life (Riaz & Kamal, 2022). Another research is conducted on the institute of marriage in Pakistan and explains that Pakistani marriages are structured by complicated interactions; the norms, culture, and familial expectations. The expectations are met by 99% of people, those who remain unable to fulfill social expectations remain un-married or if they marry by choice are kicked out of the family forever, and this traditional custom is applied all over Pakistan with minor differences (Siddiqui & Ahmed, 2020).

Social expectations are at the core of Pakistan's societal norms, being very hard and fast these social norms are taught to children since childhood, and these rules become so buckling when there is a matter of marriage and starting a new family. Marriage is bound to be arranged by family and society's choice. Not only marriage but decisions about jobs and personal lives are damn influenced and pressurized to live up to traditional expectations and norms. These decisions are obligations and feelings of duty. As a result, this situation causes a symptom of stress and anxiety (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021). There is research that claims that social expectations are the big reason for restriction on personal liberty and put unmarried men and women at risk of mental health issues and let them be part of a marginalized (Riaz & Kamal, 2022). Siddiqui and Ahmed (2020) claimed that the issue of the identity of unmarried persons needs to be negotiated and let them pave their paths to strive in their own lives. Social expectations should less or cut down to let them live their lives with resilience and self-respect. A social support network should be established to make them happier and more independent human beings and a new wave of thinking should be developed to support them and to lessen their mental stress and as a respectable human being in a society (Siddiqui & Ahmed, 2020).

Experiences of Unmarried Individuals in Pakistan

The issues of social rejection and marginalization in Pakistan which are faced by those who claim to be single and intend to remain single. Those who are single are frequently denied to get full access to opportunities and resources. They experience emotional stigma, loneliness, and exclusion. Research has emphasized that society as a whole needs treatment to understand the identity issues of unmarried people, as society should develop an attitude to understand and support such people (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021; Rehman & Khan, 2022; Ali & Qadir, 2023). Another

research adds that unmarried people face adverse experiences regarding mental health and well-being because they are not able to adhere to the conventional standards of marriage. This research has also added a perspective that married people face fewer rejections than unmarried even in other matters of life that is unmarried people experience rejection to deciding any matter of life and are considered out of the social circle. They are oddly dealt with and put in the outer circle of society and are not considered major parts of society who are marked as decision-makers (Shah & Ahmed, 2023).

Since marriage is a social institution in Pakistan approximately, 80% of adults seek parental approval when they have to make any marital decision. Thus, those who do not adhere to the voice of this institution experience criticism, and intolerance (Khan & Ahmed, 2022; Mumtaz & Salway, 2009; Hussain & Qadir, 2023). In another research, it is claimed that unmarried people experience shame, guilt, and anxiety. This research also focuses on how society needs to revisit its norms and how the social circle of unmarried people needs to be enhanced in every sphere of life. They should be part of the inner periphery and should be abandoned in the outer periphery. Thus, society needs to change its behavior towards such individuals. Society should not aloof them as handicapped human beings with less capabilities, and should address their problems, either, social, psychological, or economical (Shah & Khan, 2021; Ali & Malik, 2022).

Economic vulnerability is one of the major reasons of staying un-married. In a country like Pakistan, it needs to have enough money to get a person to marry and stay married. The lack of financial instability, financial difficulties, economic instability, inflation, and poverty, made it harder to get married in time or at any time. A person needs to be financially strong to avail of this opportunity, as the basic requirement. According to research, economic networks, and financial inclusion are necessary to get a person to marry (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021; Riaz & Kamal, 2022; Khan & Ali, 2023). A n other research focuses on the aspect that unmarried people experience more emotional pressure and high levels of depressive symptoms (Shah 2017; Khan, 2020; Hassan & Ahmed, 2021). Another research explains that women experience more depression on being single than men, and sometimes it leads to psychotic depression (Ahmed & Majeed, 2022). The crux of the whole above debate is to address the issue of unmarried persons in Pakistan as this issue is still a little discussed in the area of research.

Mental Health and Well-being of Unmarried Individuals

Unmarried people largely are affected mentally and emotionally. Their level of stress increases as long as they get away from the age of being a married person. This indicates that, since one is born he or she has to follow customs and norms otherwise the concerned person would be rejected by society. That rejection may cause depression, anxiety, and depression (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021; Khan & Ali, 2023). Though there may exist economic issues for staying unmarried or physical issues society does not understand and put the people into the realm of shame and guilt. The lower self-esteem may cause symptoms of heart attack and other mental chronic diseases. This research also added that these symptoms are more common in women than men (Riaz & Kamal, 2022). Unmarried women go in isolation and in desperation, they stop living the life of a common woman. They stop wearing good dresses, do not wear make-up, and enter old age a bit earlier. And if someone does not do it, people call her a vagabond woman (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021; Khan & Ali, 2023). Research conducted by Khan (2020), made a difference in the mental health of Pakistani married and unmarried women, he noted a notable difference between married and unmarried women. He reported that unmarried women's depression rate

is high (70%) while married women's depression level stands at a lower level (30%). The result of the research claimed that married status lowers the anxiety level and works well for the well-being and mental health of a woman while staying unmarried slowly penetrates into their brain as a disease and makes them unwell and mentally and psychologically unfit. The research concludes that regardless of marital status, social institutes should think wisely for women, unmarried especially, and men as well. They all need societal care and respect, marriage should be their personal affair, and society should not attach a stigma to marital status (Khan, 2020; Riaz & Kamal, 2022). This section, concludes that societal acceptance should be enhanced and a common person should feel liberal to decide about his/her life.

Discourse and Societal Pressure

Language and culture are part and parcel of each other. Through language a society constructs its identity of nationalism and a nation is known differently than others. Language's role is inevitable. It not only constructs identity but creates distinctions among different phenomena (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021). The role of rhetoric is vital in establishing status in any genre. Being married and unmarried are words, that create differences among marital status. This discourse lets people enter a specific community or reject them be part of that specific community (Khan & Ali, 2023). They added, that the word "Aurat ka Nikkah" or Nikkahfied frequently, highlights the significance of being married, alternatively, if someone is not Nikkahfied, he or she is excluded from the superior group. The superior group finds itself in the socially accepted group while the other are put in the rejected group. For example, usually, a question is raised in a first meeting, are you married? The answer puts the people either in an inner circle or an outer circle. Thus, social discourse plays a vital role in the institute of marriage by creating dominant narratives. Sometimes, negative discourse causes a higher level of stress and puts them in isolation, for example, the discourse as a question: are you still unmarried? No one accepted you? It seems, no one is made for you., or it looks like no one wants to make a couple with you (Hassan & Ahmed, 2022; Riaz & Kamal, 2022). The results of the studies move towards a positive analysis that Pakistani as a nation should move towards more positive discourse so that un-married people may also be part of society as normal human beings, and by creating specific discourse, we should not aloof them in a section which may harm them, socially, psychologically and financially. Foucault's theory on discourse highlights the way discourse maintains stigma and marginalizes people from the main periphery (Khan & Ali, 2023). Another study focuses on the concept that discourse shapes power relations (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021). Thus, the above studies emphasize that understanding the intricate phenomenon behind any society's norms can be sorted out by applying a theoretical lens to the discourse of that society's institute; marriage, education, politics, or gender.

Comparative Experiences of Unmarried Men and Women

Unmarried men's and women's experiences are similar in some contexts but different in other contexts. According to research, in Pakistan, a patriarchal system is very rich, which is why men face less shame and rejection than women. Women's identity, if unmarried or divorced is put in a mark and a questionable status. Society does not accept it and puts a stigma and taboo mark on her presence. Still, Hindu customs prevail in Pakistan, and so far a single woman is concerned. A single woman is perverted to sex and seems available to make flirts and free sex. This mindset of society towards her presence makes her insecure, however, men do not face such adultery, they only have to face shame and exclusion, thus being an unmarried woman in Pakistan is more pitiful and severe than being a male un-married person (Riaz & Kamal, 2022; Khan & Ali, 2023; Hassan & Ahmed, 2021). This section concludes that targeted action should be taken to promote the well-being of single people, both men and women.

Research Gap

A lot of research work is already there and many research works have already been written on the issue of being married and unmarried status in Pakistan. Comparisons are also made among both genders. Yet, some answers are needed to get answers about the identity crises of Pakistani-married people. There is a need to fill that gap by focusing on the discourse relevant to those individuals and by asking relevant questions about different situations they face and come across on a daily basis in their lives. The complex experience of singles gets attention and need to examine it thoroughly. The existing research work focuses on psychological issues, mental issues (Khan & Ali, 2023), sociological issues (Hassan & Ahmed, 2021), and demographic issues (e.g., women, not males) (Riaz & Kamal, 2022). This highlights the need for deeper and clearer research on identity issues while living in a country and part of the homeland. Thus, a study needs to be arranged on the social identity of unmarried people. This investigation needs inevitable attention being the most important and not being held earlier. The current research is established to sort out the answer to the same issue of identity.

Methodology

This research adopts the qualitative mode of research application. Through the process of interviewing and discussion process, sample data is collected. Using qualitative research design, this research investigates identity crises faced by un-married men and women in Pakistan, the data is collected by asking relevant questions to un-married men and women, the questions were asked through arranging in-depth interviews and focused group discussions. A purposive sampling technique was used and data was collected until no more questions were found to ask that is data reached at the saturation. Though a lot of questions were asked, however in the research few sample questions were added and themes were allocated to each section. The data analysis segregation was classified by allotting a theme to each section. Themes are allocated to four on the grounds of commonalities of the answers. The huge data was administrated on NVivo (1.7.2) software, made for the classification of qualitative data. After getting similar and sample answers, themes were allocated to all concerned sections.

Research Design

This research uses qualitative research design (Creswell, 2013) and investigates problems of un-married men and women regarding their social identity, men and women are investigated through interviews and group discussion. Qualitative research design is considered the best fit for thematic analysis. The collected data through interviews and discussion contain subtleties of the phenomenon under research which is the identity crises of unmarried men and women. According to Hennink et al., (2011), the combined results of interviews and discussion always produce the best results. Interviews and discussions looked into family issues, economic issues, and issues of societal rejection and how they cause identity crises in them.

Sampling Strategy

In this research, participants were selected through the purposive sampling technique, and a wide variety of populations was taken under consideration. The sample consists of unmarried Pakistani men and women with the age range of 25 to 40 who were unmarried due to any reason. Their sociocultural context was judged by asking relevant questions, and on the grounds of their answers, themes were allocated. The sampling technique made it possible to get wealthy answers and deeper insights into the under-discussion phenomenon. In this context of questions, the data saturation was involved in the sampling which involved the collection of data until new themes stopped surfacing. Thus, maximum knowledge was obtained in the concerned issue.

Techniques for Gathering Data
In this research, two main data collection strategies or techniques were administered.

1. In-Depth Interviews
In-depth interviews were conducted among the selected unmarried men and women, regarding their viewpoints, experiences, and behavior of society. They were asked what type of feelings and social pressure they had. Due to the flexibility of in-depth interviews, participants felt at ease to answer the asked questions. Kvale (2007) claimed that in-depth interviews are the best source to get the opinions, of the concerned population, directly and shortly.

2. Focused Group Discussion
In order to record their experiences, about the reaction of society while being the participants or people of the same culture, their attitudes focused group discussion was held. Morgan (1977) said, this technique of getting information is good as, it is the best way to collect information even from a single person of that group.

The above mentioned data collection techniques provided a thorough and detailed information about the identity crises of un-married men and women, of Pakistan. The data is judged through multiple procedures. Excessive data was administered through NVivo (1.7.2) software and then segregation and classification was done and themes were allocated on ground of commonalities.

Data Analysis Procedure
The thematic analysis process was involved to get the answers to the claimed research questions, the answers were identified, codified, and categorized. Braun and Clarke (2006) this process of identification, codification, and allocating themes on the basis of seminaries is the best way to get maximum knowledge on the question under observation. This methodology also sheds light on the experiences and perspectives of unmarried men and women. The data was arranged through the general; process of looking for codes, looking for themes, labeling similar themes then seeing through the lens of theoretical framework keeping in view the main or primary research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All the data was managed through using a software, NVivo (1.7.2) software, made for the qualitative data analysis.

Instruments and Tools
In this research, NVivo (1.7.2) software was used, and interviews and discussion groups were administered. In both situations open-ended questions were asked but while keeping in view the primary questions. Later on, based on answers, a theme was allocated to each section. These two selected methods of data collection offered a wide range of responses about the social injustice and rejection faced by unmarried Pakistani men and women.

Theoretical Framework
There are many theoretical framework or lenses to judge the collected data. To analyze data collected from un-married men and women Theory of social identity threat (TSIT) is applied.

Theory of Social Identity Threat (SITT)
Social Identity Threat Theory (SITT) states that social issues faced by people of society. It helps to analyze discourse and hidden realities in that discourse. In this research problems faced by un-married men and women are judged by seeing collected data through the lens of SITT. This theory is given by Tajfel and Turner (1979). This is the exact relevant theory to analyze the data in this research.

The main postulates of SITT (Tajfel &Turner,1979) theory are given below:

1. Social Identity Threat

This section deals with the area when a person feels as his, her identity is in a situation of danger. For example, if someone feels his or her identity is on stake and danger. As un-married men and women in Pakistan face such issues in a culture which only accepts married people, if they reach to the age of marriage. They may experience tension and anxiety when relatives ask questions about marital statuses. This concern of social identity is judged through this postulate of the theory.

2. Identity-Based Threats

This section deals with the issues if a person faces threats from peers and close family members. For example, unmarried people in Pakistan experience guilt and shame from family members being not fit to the society, that is not getting married, as all siblings are married and one is left behind on account of any reason.

3. Coping Strategies

This section deals with the issue of different strategies applied by un-married men and women. These strategies include the attitude of denying the significance of marrying, in order to save their face and self-respect. They denied that they themselves did not want to get marry. That is, positively redefining themselves and telling people that being single is a better idea than being, it makes you satisfied and free to move in life.

Data Presentation

Men: Semi-Structured Interviews

Question 1: Can you describe a situation where you felt like your social identity as an unmarried man was threatened? How did you cope with it?

Sample Answer: *"During family gatherings, relatives often ask when I'm getting married. Once, my aunt made a comment about me being 'still single.' I felt embarrassed and belittled. To cope, I tried to change the subject and focused on my career achievements."*

Theme: Social Stigma and Coping Mechanisms.

Description

The situation described illustrates the social stigma associated with being an unmarried man, particularly in a societal context where marriage is often viewed as a significant life milestone. The aunt's comment, *"still single,"* implies that being unmarried is somehow incomplete or undesirable.

Coping Mechanisms

Avoidance: The individual tries to change the subject, diverting attention away from their marital status.

Self-redefinition: By focusing on career achievements, the individual reasserts their identity and self-worth beyond their marital status.

This response highlights the tension between societal expectations and individual experiences, showcasing how people navigate and cope with stigma.

Question 2: How do you think societal pressure to get married affects your self-esteem and mental well-being?

Sample Answer: *"The pressure makes me feel like I'm not good enough. I sometimes doubt my worth and wonder if there's something wrong with me. It affects my mental health, and I feel anxious about meeting societal expectations."*

Theme: Societal Pressure and Mental Health.

Description

The societal pressure to get married can have profound effects on an individual's self-esteem and mental well-being. The expectation to conform to traditional norms can lead to feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and anxiety. Specifically, this pressure can manifest in:

Negative Self-Perception: Feeling like one is *"not good enough"* or that there's something inherently wrong with being unmarried.

Anxiety and Stress: The weight of meeting societal expectations can lead to increased anxiety and stress levels.

Impact on Mental Health: The constant pressure can erode self-esteem, contributing to mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety disorders.

This highlights the critical need to address and challenge these societal pressures to promote better mental health and self-acceptance**.**

Question 3: Have you ever experienced identity-based threats due to your marital status? If so, how did you manage them?

Sample Answer: *"Yes, friends would tease me about being single, saying I'm not a 'real man' yet. I managed it by talking to close friends who understand me and by focusing on my strengths and accomplishments."*

Theme: Identity-Based Threats and Management.

Description

The experience of identity-based threats due to marital status can be damaging, particularly when societal norms equate marriage with maturity or masculinity. Teasing comments, such *as "not a 'real man' yet,"* can undermine an individual's sense of identity and self-worth.

Management Strategies:

Social Support: Seeking validation and understanding from close friends who accept and appreciate the individual beyond their marital status.

Self-Affirmation: Focusing on personal strengths and accomplishments to reinforce self-identity and counter negative perceptions.

This highlights the importance of supportive relationships and self-empowerment in mitigating the impact of identity-based threats and maintaining a positive self-image.

Question 4: Do you use any coping mechanisms to deal with social identity threats related to being unmarried? If so, what are they?

Sample Answer: *"I try to surround myself with supportive people who don't judge me based on my marital status. I also focus on my hobbies and personal growth to boost my self-confidence."*

Theme: Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems.

Description

Coping with social identity threats related to being unmarried requires effective strategies to maintain self-esteem and confidence.

Supportive Network: Surrounding oneself with understanding and non-judgmental people who value individuality.

Personal Growth: Engaging in hobbies and self-improvement activities to enhance self-confidence and self-worth.

These coping mechanisms help individuals build resilience against societal pressures, fostering a positive self-image and emotional well-being.

Question 5: How do you think being unmarried in a society that values marriage impacts your relationships with others?

Sample Answer: ***"It makes me feel like I'm often judged or pitied by married friends and family. I've had to be selective about the company I keep and find friends who accept me for who I am."***

Theme: Social Relationships and Marriage Expectations.

Description

Being unmarried in a society that highly values marriage can significantly impact relationships with others. The pressure and expectations from married friends and family can lead to feelings of:

Judgment and Pity: Being viewed as incomplete or pitied due to marital status.

Social Exclusion: Feeling like an outsider among married peers.

To navigate these challenges, individuals may need to:

Be Selective: Choose relationships with people who accept and value them beyond their marital status.

Seek Acceptance: Find supportive friends and communities that understand and appreciate individual differences.

This highlights the importance of building a supportive social network that fosters acceptance and understanding.

Women: Semi-Structured Interview

Question 1: Can you share an experience where you felt like your social identity as an unmarried woman was threatened? How did you handle it?

Sample Answer: ***"At a family gathering, relatives kept asking when I was getting married. One of them implied I was 'too picky.' I felt defensive and belittled. I handled it by calmly explaining my priorities and goals."***

Theme: Social Stigma and Assertive Response.

Description

The experience highlights the social stigma faced by unmarried women, where relatives' intrusive questions and judgments can threaten their social identity. Feeling defensive and belittled, the individual responds assertively by:

Calm Explanation: Clearly communicating priorities and goals.

Assertive Response: Standing up for oneself without aggression, setting boundaries and asserting autonomy.

This showcases the importance of assertiveness in managing social stigma, maintaining self-respect, and redefining societal expectations.

Question 2: How do you think societal expectations around marriage and femininity affect your self-perception and identity?

Sample Answer: ***"Societal expectations make me feel like I'm not fulfilling my 'duty' as a woman. It affects my self-perception, and I sometimes feel like I'm not good enough. I try to focus on my strengths and goals."***

Theme: Societal Expectations and Self-Perception.

Description

Societal expectations around marriage and femininity can profoundly impact self-perception and identity. The pressure to conform to traditional norms can lead to feelings of:

Inadequacy: Feeling like one is not fulfilling their *"duty"* as a woman.

Self-Doubt: Questioning one's worth and identity.

To cope, individuals may focus on:

 Self-Affirmation: Emphasizing personal strengths and goals.

Reframing Identity: Redefining what it means to be a woman beyond societal expectations.

This highlights the tension between societal expectations and individual identity, emphasizing the importance of self-empowerment and redefinition.

Question 3: Have you ever faced identity-based threats due to your marital status? If so, how did you cope with them?

Sample Answer: *"Yes, I've faced comments about being 'old-fashioned' for not getting married. I cope by reminding myself of my values and priorities, and seeking support from friends who understand me."*

Theme: Identity-Based Threats and Resilience.

Description

Identity-based threats due to marital status can arise from derogatory comments or societal expectations. Individuals may face:

Negative Stereotypes: Being labeled as *"old-fashioned"* or other negative attributes.

Coping Mechanisms: Reminding oneself of personal values and priorities, and seeking support from understanding friends.

This highlights the importance of resilience and support systems in maintaining a positive self-image despite external pressures.

Question 4: Do you use any strategies to redefine what it means to be unmarried in a positive way? If so, what are they?

Sample Answer: *"I focus on my career and personal growth, and I've joined online communities where women share similar experiences. It helps me see being unmarried as a positive choice."*

Theme: Redefining Unmarried Identity.

Description

Redefining unmarried identity involves proactive strategies to reclaim and reframe the narrative. Personal Growth: Focusing on career and self-improvement.

Community Support: Connecting with like-minded individuals through online communities or support groups.

Positive Reframing: Viewing being unmarried as a positive choice or opportunity.

This highlights the importance of self-empowerment, community, and reframing societal narratives to foster a positive unmarried identity.

Question 5: How do you think social support from others (e.g., friends, family, online communities) helps you manage social identity threats related to being unmarried?

Sample Answer: *"Support from friends and online communities is crucial. They understand me and provide emotional support, which helps me feel more confident and less isolated."*

Theme: Social Support and Identity Management.

Description

Social support plays a vital role in managing social identity threats related to being unmarried.

Emotional Support: Receiving understanding and empathy from others.

Validation: Feeling accepted and valued by others.

Reduced Isolation: Connecting with others who share similar experiences.

This highlights the importance of social support networks in fostering confidence, resilience, and a positive sense of self.

Focused Group Discussion: Men

Question 1: How do you think societal norms around marriage contribute to social identity threats for unmarried men in Pakistan?

Sample Answer: *"Societal norms around marriage create pressure and expectations that unmarried men can't meet. It's like we're not considered 'real men' until we're married."*

Theme: Societal Norms and Identity Threats.

Description

Societal norms around marriage in Pakistan can contribute to social identity threats for unmarried men by:

Creating Pressure: Expecting men to conform to traditional marital roles.

Defining Masculinity: Equating marriage with masculinity, leading to feelings of inadequacy.

Social Judgment: Perpetuating stereotypes and stigma around unmarried men.

This highlights the need to challenge and redefine these norms to promote a more inclusive and accepting society.

Question 2: Can you discuss ways in which unmarried men in Pakistan can work together to challenge or change societal expectations around marriage?

Sample Answer: *"We can start by sharing our stories and experiences, and creating a support network. We can also use social media to raise awareness and promote positive narratives about being unmarried."*

Theme: Collective Action and Social Change.

Description

Unmarried men in Pakistan can work together to challenge societal expectations around marriage through:

Storytelling: Sharing personal experiences to create empathy and understanding.

Support Networks: Building communities that provide emotional support and validation.

Social Media Activism: Raising awareness and promoting positive narratives about being unmarried.

This collective approach can help redefine societal norms, promote acceptance, and foster a more inclusive environment.

Question 3: What role do you think identity denial or identity redefinition plays in coping with social identity threats related to being unmarried?

Sample Answer: *"Redefining what it means to be unmarried can be empowering. It's about embracing our identity and finding ways to define ourselves on our own terms."*

Theme: Identity Redefinition and Empowerment.

Description

Identity redefinition plays a crucial role in coping with social identity threats related to being unmarried.

Reclaiming Narratives: Redefining what it means to be unmarried.

Self-Definition: Embracing personal identity and autonomy.

Empowerment: Finding strength in self-acceptance and self-expression.

This process enables individuals to challenge societal norms, build resilience, and cultivate a positive sense of self.

Question 4: How do you think social support from others can help unmarried men manage social identity threats?

Sample Answer: *"Social support is crucial. Having people who understand and accept us can help us feel more confident and less isolated. It's like having a safety net."*

Theme: Social Support and Identity Management.

Description

Social support from others plays a vital role in helping unmarried men manage social identity threats:

Providing Validation: Offering acceptance and understanding.

Boosting Confidence: Enhancing self-esteem and self-worth.

Reducing Isolation: Creating a sense of community and connection.

This support system serves as a safety net, enabling individuals to navigate societal pressures and maintain a positive sense of identity.

Question 5: What are some potential benefits of redefining what it means to be unmarried in a positive way?

Sample Answer: *"Redefining what it means to be unmarried can help us focus on our strengths and goals, rather than societal expectations. It can also promote self-acceptance and self-love."*

Theme: Positive Identity Redefinition and Benefits.

Description

Redefining what it means to be unmarried in a positive way can have numerous benefits, including:

Increased Autonomy: Focusing on personal strengths and goals.

Improved Self-Acceptance: Promoting self-love and self-acceptance.

Empowerment: Breaking free from societal expectations and embracing individuality.

This redefinition can lead to a more positive and empowered sense of identity, allowing individuals to thrive and live authentically.

Focused Group Discussion: Women

Question 1: How do you think societal expectations around marriage and femininity contribute to social identity threats for unmarried women in Pakistan?

Sample Answer: *"Societal expectations around marriage and femininity create a lot of pressure on women to conform to traditional roles. Unmarried women are often seen as incomplete or inadequate."*

Theme: Societal Expectations and Identity Threats.

Description

Societal expectations around marriage and femininity in Pakistan contribute to social identity threats for unmarried women by:

Perpetuating Stereotypes: Viewing unmarried women as incomplete or inadequate.

Pressuring Conformity: Expecting women to adhere to traditional roles and timelines.

Limiting Identity: Defining womanhood narrowly through marriage and family.

This highlights the need to challenge and broaden these expectations to promote a more inclusive and accepting society.

Question 2: Can you discuss ways in which unmarried women in Pakistan can work together to challenge or change societal norms around marriage and femininity?

Sample Answer: *"We can start by sharing our stories and experiences, and creating a support network. We can also use social media to raise awareness and promote positive narratives about unmarried women."*

Theme: Collective Action and Social Change.

Description

Unmarried women in Pakistan can work together to challenge societal norms by:

Sharing Experiences: Creating a platform for storytelling and solidarity.

Building Support Networks: Fostering communities that provide emotional support and validation.

Raising Awareness: Utilizing social media and other platforms to promote positive narratives and challenge stereotypes.

This collective approach can help redefine societal norms, promote acceptance, and empower unmarried women to live authentically.

Question 3: What role do you think social support seeking plays in coping with social identity threats related to being unmarried?

Sample Answer: *"Social support seeking is crucial. Talking to friends, family, or online communities who understand and accept us can help us feel more confident and less isolated."*

Theme: Social Support and Coping.

Description

Social support seeking plays a vital role in coping with social identity threats related to being unmarried:

Providing Emotional Support: Offering a sense of understanding and acceptance.

Reducing Isolation: Creating connections with others who share similar experiences.

Boosting Confidence: Enhancing self-esteem and self-worth through validation.

This support system helps individuals navigate societal pressures and maintain a positive sense of identity.

Question 4: How do you think identity redefinition can help unmarried women manage social identity threats?

Sample Answer: *"Identity redefinition can help us focus on our strengths and goals, rather than societal expectations. It can also promote self-acceptance and self-love."*

Theme: Identity Redefinition and Empowerment.

Description

Identity redefinition can help unmarried women manage social identity threats by:

Reclaiming Narratives: Redefining what it means to be unmarried.

Focusing on Strengths: Prioritizing personal goals and aspirations.

Promoting Self-Acceptance: Embracing individuality and self-love.

This process enables women to break free from societal expectations, build confidence, and cultivate a positive sense of self.

Question 5: What are some potential challenges or benefits of seeking social support from others when facing social identity threats?

Sample Answer: "One challenge is that not everyone may understand or accept our choices. However, the benefits far outweigh the challenges. Social support can provide emotional validation and help us feel less alone."

Theme: Social Support: Challenges and Benefits.

Description

Seeking social support when facing social identity threats can have both challenges and benefits:

Challenges

Lack of Understanding: Not everyone may understand or accept individual choices.

Negative Reactions: Some may respond with judgment or criticism.

Benefits

Emotional Validation: Receiving acceptance and empathy from others.

Reduced Isolation: Feeling connected and less alone.

Increased Confidence: Gaining self-assurance through support and validation.

Overall, the benefits of social support can outweigh the challenges, leading to improved well-being and resilience.

Comparative Analysis of Emerging Themes

Semi-Structured Interviews

Men vs. Women

Semi-structured interviews are ever considered the best way to get thorough information regarding any topic. The results of this research explore that social pressure; and social

expectations surround un-married individuals. Men and women, both have to face a tag of shame almost daily in their lives. The research indicates that such individuals almost remain in this situation, not only due to strangers but also due to their close ones. Even close ones hit them with sarcastic discourse just to pinch them. While men and women use different strategies to cope with the situation. This is the fact that they feel guilt, shame, and exclusion daily. Regularly people ask them and with time these individuals also learn the way to coping the situation and develop different strategies to coping it. Men and women coping the situation, differently. Women do use more aggressive strategies, for example, they establish boundaries of a circle and they do not let enter outsiders their circle and make themselves normal. They deal with stigma by designing for themselves hard and fast rules. These strategies are considered aggressive but these are established by them to get rid of this stigma of being un-married. Men too use coping strategies more frequently, as some of them said, they shift the topic, to avoid that stigma. Men said that they stick to their professional accomplishments to turn or shift from the topic of marriage.

The results of this study conclude that women's identity and self-respect are hurt while men's mental health is disturbed by the social pressure of not getting married in time or forever. It is also observed that unmarried men and women leave social gathering and switch on the social media networks to coping the situation. In this regard, Cohen et al., (2015) claimed that social support is necessary to get rid of this situation of social stigma which leaves indelible impacts on the social and mental health of people. Otherwise, people have to employ different coping to avoid such situations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The results provide a comprehensive detail that as a society it needs to be mature. People should not ask direct questions, time and again of a person's personal life. Marriage should be a totally, personal decision and people should free this institution from social biases. If a society accepts individualities, then there would be no identity crisis issues and such individuals need to be coping to handle the odd situations.

Focused Group Discussion

Men vs. Women

Focus group discussion is the best way to get information on any issue from the selected sample. It is preferable as it provides enriching information as responses are got from people at the individual level. It is a way to get knowledge at grass root level. On asking questions both men and women reported that they handle the situation through coping for personal growth and independence. They also added that coping with the situation enhances their self-esteem and self-assurance. This research suggests that social support is necessary to save unmarried men and women from social identity threats. The research also explored that women face more challenging situations than men. Women always face additional pathetic situations and they have to pay more mental energies to cope with such situations. Both men and women revealed that society as a whole need to take collective action and change their minds towards societal norms. Society should promote social change and let unmarried men and women spend their lives freely and inclusively. Workplaces should make congenial places and let unmarried men and women be part of that group, moreover, empowerment should be allocated to them. Additionally, they added, that societal acceptance and recognition may be a reason for confidence and mental growth in them.

The results of the study revealed that by emphasizing the positive social action of acceptance, and social support and by fostering empowerment and confidence a change may be come in Pakistani society, and unmarried men and women may live a peaceful life of their own will and wish. Tajfel and Turner (1979) claim that intergroup connections can bring social transformation, he said this in his social identity threat theory. Thus, this research's results match very extent

with the theory of (Tajfel &Turner,1979). In this regard, Cohen et al., (2015) support that social support is crucial and acceptance should come from the social reformers' side. Thus, this research revealed that for better and higher performative results in favor of the acceptance of unmarried men and women, an approach should start from the upper social level or social reforms' side. Thoits (2011) also agrees with this point and says social connections are important and acknowledgment and respect of each individual's will and wishes may bring harmony in the society.

Result and Conclusion

The results of the study are beneficial for the creation of supportive networks and the actions are meant to develop the well-being and mental security of Pakistan's single populace. The results also highlight the value of group efforts, social support, and collective rehabilitation for providing them confidence, free will, free choice, confidence, and empowerment. These findings may help guide to development of a support network to improve the social life of unmarried men and women. The present research concludes that singles must cope with the situation to save their face. The study also reveals that women suffer more than men. It is also suggested for the future researchers to explore various programs and policies to overcome the challenges of identity crisis of the un-married people in Pakistani context.

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