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**A Sociological Review of  
Marital Quality among  
Working Couples in  
Bangalore City**

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# A SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW OF MARITAL QUALITY AMONG WORKING COUPLES IN BANGALORE CITY

**Shiju Joseph\* and Anand Inbanathan\*\***

## **Abstract**

One of the foundational relationships that has undergone substantial changes in recent times in India is the bond between married partners. A simultaneous change with far-reaching consequences is the newly-discovered focus on career among women. The interface of career and home has given rise to newer challenges that influence the quality of marital relationships. In this context, the paper seeks to understand the 'couple relationship' of married professionals from a sociological perspective in an Indian urban context. Using a culturally relevant marital scale developed by Shah (1991), the marital quality of 238 working professionals in Bangalore was examined. The study found that men reported higher levels of marital quality compared to women. Also, marital quality seems to be curvilinear over the course of the marriage. A key aspect that influenced the marital quality of urban career-focused individuals is the lack of quality time available as a marital dyad. The traditional norms of gender roles are also at play influencing the perception of the quality of one's marriage.

## **Introduction**

Marriage continues to be an important social institution in India even in a time of changing social mores. Marriage is "not merely a set of social arrangements but also ideas, beliefs and values by which those arrangements are sustained" (Beteille, 1992: 13). Traditionally, a marital union was regarded as perpetual and as an indissoluble sacrament in the cultural milieu of Indian society (Aura, 2008; Ramachandrappa, 2012). Marriages in India are not limited to the bond between the couple, but are perceived as a relationship between two families which are brought together socially (Aura, 2008). However, modernising forces have altered the socio-cultural fabric of India, influencing the structure, functioning and role expectations of familial and marital relationships (Madan, 1993; Singh, 2002; Sharangpani, 2010).

Economic liberalisation and the spread of education have led to greater employment opportunities, changing the functions of the family and the consequent questioning of traditional patriarchal notions. Particularly for women, this change has been more significant where their participation in the labour market is beyond just supplementary incomes, but in search of fulfilling careers. Evidence from different census years presents an interesting picture on the work participation rate of women. The proportion of women participating in the labour force increased from 19.67 per cent during 1981 to 22.73 per cent in 1991, further rising to 25.68 per cent in 2001. However, during the 2011 census period, the workforce participation showed a decline (25.51 per cent). Similarly, the 68<sup>th</sup> round of the NSS Survey showed that urban work force participation of women remained low at 14.7 per cent (Abraham, 2013). The impact of global recession could offer some insights into the declining labour force participation, particularly of urban women. Overall, it is evident that women are now more

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active economic agents with career aspirations (compared to a few decades ago), and are more than merely supplementing the family income. As a result of this, husbands and wives need to cope with their new status as 'career couples', besides managing their additional familial obligations. Thus, the increased incomes of urban families have helped bring to the surface challenges that need to be addressed not only at the workplace, but also in the family sphere.

The dual-earning couple's situation furnishes compelling evidence of the increasing educational and career aspirations of women. A significant proportion of these women in the workforce comprises wives and mothers whose employment status will demand a significant change in their pattern of activities, commitments and responsibilities, requiring a reassessment of the family environment (Henry and Parthasarathy, 2010). The changing cultural practices, growing instances of marital breakdown, and the nuclearisation of families, point to the possibility of heightening intra- and inter-familial tensions, affecting the quality and satisfaction of the marital relationship itself (Rangarao and Sekhar, 2002).

Studies on the family have received wide attention in global sociological literature, ranging across themes such as married relationships, cohabiting partners, parenthood, and old age. However, comparatively less attention has been given to understanding the dynamics of the marital dyad itself, especially from a sociological perspective. It would be interesting to explore the impact of changing times on marital relationships in the context of India, which has retained much of its cultural roots and yet is advancing towards a modernised version of relationship networks. In this context, the paper attempts to understand the subtleties and quality of marital relationship among urban couples who have a definite career focus.

The paper is organised into six sections. First, a background to the study is provided, followed by a discussion on the concept of marital quality in the second section. A brief overview of marital scales has been presented in the third section. Data and methodology, consisting of the instrument of data collection, study area and respondents, form the fourth section of the paper. The fifth section presents the analysis on marital quality and a discussion of the results, with the various factors that influence marital quality. The last section summarises the major findings and concludes the paper.

## **Marital Quality**

There is considerable ambiguity in defining and operationalising concepts related to marriage (Sinha, 1996). Concepts such as marital satisfaction, marital success, marital quality, marital adjustment, etc. have been assigned overlapping definitions. Marital satisfaction, a widely used concept, is understood differently by different people, depending on one's culture, gender, employment, status, etc. Another more encompassing concept to understand the subjective perceptions of married couples, which also include satisfaction, is the concept of marital quality. By and large, the concept of marital quality includes "satisfaction, happiness, adjustment, and other related dimensions and evaluations of the marital relationship" (Thomas, *et al*, 1984: 514). Roach *et al* (1981) defined satisfaction as an attitude which can change over time, especially in relation to significant life experiences. Cohen *et al* (2010) clarify that marital quality is "measured by querying components of the relationship chosen by the researcher and is thus determined by criteria established by the researcher," while marital satisfaction "refers to the respondents' subjective feelings about their marriages" (Cohen *et al*, 2010:731).

These concepts of marital satisfaction and quality are heavily laden with cultural and ethnic overtones (Chand, 2008). The sources and channels of such satisfaction and higher quality are culturally determined, and in India they continue, to a great extent, to be determined by familism. The western constructs of marital quality may be entirely different in an Asian context, where marital satisfaction and quality would include not only the relationship between the husband and wife, but also the relationship with in-laws, children, and social networks, which also form significant factors in determining marital happiness. It is important to note the cultural context of this concept since the cultural mediation of the concept and its operationalisation can seriously affect comparability across various tools of measurement (Lucas *et al*, 2008).

It is thus evident from the considerable overlapping of constructs related to the measurement of factors in marital life that attempts at compartmentalising individual concepts could distance them from the reality as experienced by the married people. Thus, marital quality in our study is considered as a multi-dimensional global construct, which refers to the presence of a sense of contentment regarding marital relationship and a positive evaluation of the behaviour of partners within marriage. This is measured by assessing how one feels about one's marriage at a given point in time, and how frequently one perceives the marital interactions with a partner positively. How one perceives the behaviour of the partner and the resulting sense of satisfaction/dissatisfaction is an important indicator of the potential the relationship holds in achieving marital adjustment.

Therefore, a high quality marriage is one which has a fairly good mix of actual behaviour that promote/foster marital adjustment, and a feeling of satisfaction with the demonstration of such behaviour. It is to be noted here that though marital quality can be easily spoken of at the level of the couple, the quality of the individual in the relationship is measured as part of the study. It would not be far off the mark to assume that one partner's experience of the quality of the relationship can be an indicator of the quality of the marriage itself.

## **Data and Methodology**

The scales that measure marital satisfaction and related concepts are largely found in studies in a Western context (Spanier, 1976; Fowers and Olson, 1993; Crane *et al*, 2000). They invariably assume that the meaning of marriage and partnership are understood in a particular way by the respondents. Considering the importance that culture plays in defining and endorsing factors of marital relationship, it is valuable to assess the marital quality of working professionals in India by using culturally appropriate instruments.

Taking this point into consideration, the study used the Marital Quality Scale developed by Shah (1991) in the Indian urban context. The scale was developed using a normative sample of over 300 respondents, of whom 86 per cent had at least graduate education, and 80 per cent were working professionals. Therefore, the scale was considered appropriate for a study of marital quality among urban working professionals. The scale, however, does not take into account the specific nature/demands of the career the respondent pursues. This makes it applicable to a variety of respondents regardless of their career status since the questions only pertain to their marital life.

The Marital Quality Scale consists of 50 statements with four answer categories and asks the respondent to indicate how often the content of each statement holds good in his/her case. The statements covered opinions (e.g.: My spouse's opinion carries as much weight as mine in money matters.), feelings (e.g.: My spouse makes me feel secure.), behaviour (e.g. My spouse argues with me in front of other people.) and perceptions (e.g. My spouse does not like me.). The scale consists of core dimensions that define the quality of marital relationship to include mutual understanding, perception of acceptance/rejection, satisfaction, affection, level of despair, decision-making, discontent, dissolution potential, dominance, self-disclosure, mutual trust and role-functioning (Shah, 1991).

Positively and negatively worded statements were interspersed throughout the scale. The scale has separate forms for men and women; both forms are identically phrased except for linguistic changes necessitated by gender difference. The range of total score obtainable on the scale is 50 to 200, and higher scores indicate poor quality marital life. Shah (1991) did not find any significant difference in the t-test scores of males and females and thus ruled out any sex bias in the scale. The coefficient alpha for the scale reported a high internal consistency (0.91) and the test-retest reliability score was 0.83, indicating the fairly adequate reliability of the scale. Construct validity of the scale was established through a factorial reduction of items and by a demonstration of its ability to differentiate persons with marital disharmony from the general population.

## **Data Collection**

The first section of the instrument consisted of a letter from the researcher seeking the cooperation of the respondent and assuring confidentiality. This was followed by a series of questions (Section A) that sought various socio-demographic details regarding the respondent, his/her spouse, and family. Section B comprised the Marital Quality Scale developed by Shah (1991) consisting of 50 statements with four answer categories, where the respondent was asked to indicate how often the content of each statement holds good in his/her case. Since the present study focuses on examining marital quality across career-oriented couples, it was important to include work-related dimensions as well. A researcher-addressed, postage-paid envelope was provided so that the completed questionnaire could be returned by mail. Two separate sets of instruments were prepared since the Marital Quality Scale required separate forms for men and women. This also helped in making the instrument more endearing and personal since the gender pronouns were always appropriate.

The area of study is the city of Bangalore in Karnataka. Bangalore presents an ideal location due to the presence of a large number of IT sector establishments, and educational and medical institutions, where one can expect a large pool of professional couples.

## **Respondents of the Study**

Getting respondents to participate in a study which explores their private lives is difficult across the world, but more so in societies such as India. A number of studies on marital relationships across the globe have resorted to convenient sampling. Myers' comparative study of marital satisfaction among marriages of choice in the United States and arranged marriages in India used the members of one of the researchers' social and religious groups to recruit respondents (Myers *et al*, 2005). Some studies

used a combination of methods to enlist respondents for the study (Cohen *et al*, 2010). A PhD research used websites that allow surveys and social networking websites in order to recruit respondents (Alder, 2010) and the sample size consisted of sixty respondents. Wong and Goodwin (2009) used the snowballing recruitment approach, and it led to the clustering of respondents in some occupations and in socio-economic status.

Since the study is related to the sensitive private areas of one's life, the respondents were contacted using a combination of convenient sampling and snowball sampling. In order to qualify as a respondent in the study, one had to be married and a working professional living along with the spouse in Bangalore. The researcher sought the assistance of various corporate offices, banking and educational institutions to get in touch with the respondents in Bangalore. An effort was made to ensure variety in the profile of the respondents' sample as will be seen in the demographic data. The data collected through the questionnaires were subjected to quantitative data analysis to cull out the marital quality of working couples and its relationship with the socio-economic background of the couples.

## **Findings**

The main purpose of the study is to assess the marital quality among working professionals in an urban context. In all, 239 respondents filled in the questionnaire. While most of the questionnaires were filled in the presence of an investigator, some of them were mailed by the respondents to the investigator. However, it is to be noted that all respondents, except for one, answered all the questions in the Marital Quality Scale. The case which had the incomplete answer was discarded, taking the total number of usable cases to 238. The data collected through the questionnaires were subjected to appropriate quantitative data analysis to cull out marital quality and its relationship, if any, to the socio-economic background of the respondents. The objective here is to measure the quality of marriage among urban working professionals as perceived by themselves and to find its relationship to select background variables.

## **Summary Statistics**

The sample consisted of a total of 238 married professionals (104 males and 134 females). Table 1 provides the summary statistics of the respondents of the study. The average age of the respondents was around 39 years. It is interesting to note that the mean age at marriage was around 26 years reflecting the career focus of these married professionals. The average duration of marriage was 13 years with a standard deviation over 9 years reflecting the wide spectrum of duration of marriage that is covered. On an average, the working professionals were away from work for about 10 hours in a day. The mean of Marital Quality score was 81.5 with a standard deviation of 22.8. The presence of children in a marriage makes an important difference in the relationship. Most of the respondents had only one child, reflecting the changing cultural norm of the urban society today.

**Table 1: Summary Statistics of the Respondents**

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Age of self	238	38.8	9.4
Difference in Age - Actual	238	4.4	2.2
Daily work related absence-(Self)	231	9.5	2.0
Duration of marriage	236	12.9	9.3
Age at Marriage (Self)	236	25.9	3.7
Number of Children	205	1.3	0.8

**Source:** Sample Survey (2012-13)

## Gender

Men and women experience marriages differently and have different expectations from it (Fowers, 1991). Research suggests that men generally report higher levels of marital satisfaction when compared to women (Clements and Swensen, 2000:113), and that women's marital experiences are more negative than those of men (Heaton and Blake, 1999:30). This, especially when coupled with careers, can lead to a different set of expectations and role reversals on several fronts. For instance, the high level of education that goes with a career status and the financial independence that a career accords a woman, may enable her to be more vocal regarding disagreements with the spouse and she may have greater expectations from her husband on sharing of household tasks (Wilkee, Ferree and Ratcliff, 1998). At the same time, the financial independence of the woman may influence her to have higher expectations from her husband, which may conflict with the traditional role expectations defined for men in society, leading to differences of opinion, and thereby affecting the quality of their marriage. Therefore, it will be interesting to see how the aspects of marital quality and satisfaction are influenced by gender.

Table 2 lists the basic background details of the respondents across gender. A cursory look at the profile of the respondents shows that the sample had more cases of arranged marriages (76.4 per cent) without significant gender differences. The majority of the respondents (34.2 per cent) had completed professional bachelor's courses whereas 5.3 per cent had attained M.Phil /PhD/ MD/ CA degrees. A major proportion of males (32.7 per cent) and females (43.3 per cent) in the sample were teaching/research professionals, while the lowest number of professionals came from the medical profession, without significant gender difference. The professionals from the IT sector had a greater proportion of males (18.3 per cent) compared to females (10.4 per cent).

The type of family (whether parents/in-laws stay with the couple or not) and whether the couple had a love or arranged marriage are also included in the analysis. Family structure mostly consisted of nuclear families as against joint families. A majority of the respondents (76.4 per cent) had an arranged marriage without significant gender difference, confirming the perception that most marriages in India are arranged. Despite reports that self-choice marriages are increasing in number, arranged marriages still continue to dominate. This is reflected in our sample too where only 23.6 per cent of the marriages were based on self-choice mate selection. However, it would be safe to say that self-choice marriages are slowly gaining acceptability in India, especially in the cities (Mines and Jayaraj, 1998; Aura, 2008).

**Table 2: Profile of the Respondents across Gender**

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Age Self	24 to 34	26 (25)	68 (50.7)	94 (39.5)
	35 to 44	37 (35.6)	33 (24.6)	70 (29.4)
	45 to 54	32 (30.8)	28 (20.9)	60 (25.2)
	Above 54	9 (8.7)	5 (3.7)	14 (5.9)
Education	Bachelors	18 (17.8)	24 (19.4)	42 (18.7)
	Bachelors. Prof	38 (37.6)	39 (31.5)	77 (34.2)
	Masters	17 (16.8)	28 (22.6)	45 (20)
	Masters. Prof	22 (21.8)	27 (21.8)	49 (21.8)
	M. Phil /PhD/ MD/ CA	6 (5.9)	6 (4.8)	12 (5.3)
Profession	Government Service	6 (5.8)	10 (7.5)	16 (6.7)
	IT, ITES	19 (18.3)	14 (10.4)	33 (13.9)
	Banking	22 (21.2)	34 (25.4)	56 (23.5)
	Medical Professional	3 (2.9)	4 (3.0)	7 (2.9)
	Teaching/ Research	34 (32.7)	58 (43.3)	92 (38.7)
	Self-employed Business	12 (11.5)	2 (1.5)	14 (5.9)
	Other	8 (7.7)	12 (9.0)	20 (8.4)
Type of marriage	Arranged Marriage	80 (77.7)	101 (75.4)	181 (76.4)
	Love marriage	23 (23.3)	33 (24.6)	56 (23.6)
Family Structure	Nuclear	71 (68.3)	76 (56.7)	147 (61.8)
	Extended/Joint	33 (31.7)	58 (43.3)	91 (38.2)

**Source:** Sample Survey (2012-13)

**Note:** Numbers in parentheses indicate corresponding percentages.

### Age at Marriage

The age at which individuals marry is a gendered reality. Age at marriage is a variable that is known to have an inverse relationship with marital instability (Alder, 2010). Accompanied by the spread of school and college education there has been a dramatic rise in the marriage age of girls among upper class and upper middle class. "Till the end of the 19th century and into the beginning of the 20th, a low age at marriage for girls, preferably within the age of puberty, was the norm among the upper castes whose descendants now dominate the superior non-manual occupations; by a curious irony of history, a low age at marriage is today officially acknowledged as a criterion of low caste status" (Beteille, 1992: 17). In a study of 778 couples, Lee (1977) found that age at marriage was positively correlated with marital satisfaction. Table 3 gives the age at marriage for both male and female respondents.

**Table 3: Distribution of Age at Marriage by Gender**

	Category	Male	Female	Total
Age at Marriage	Up to 25 Years	12 (11.8)	102 (76.1)	114 (48.3)
	26 to 30 Years	74 (72.5)	28 (20.9)	102 (43.2)
	Above 30 Years	16 (15.7)	4 (3.0)	20 (8.5)

**Source:** Sample Survey (2012-13)

**Note:** Numbers in parentheses indicate corresponding percentages.

Table 3 shows the diversity in age at marriage for males and females based on the sample survey. More than three-fourths of the female respondents married before the age of 25 while most men married between 26 to 30 years of age. Only 3 per cent of the females married past the age of thirty years. These results on the time of first marriage show that gender scripts are quite strong for women, pushing them towards early marriages, compared to their male counterparts despite substantial improvements in educational and career advancement.

### Time-based Stress

A major challenge that men and women in dual career marriages are likely to face is time management. This is directly related to the amount of time one is away from home for work, including the travel time to the workplace indicating the amount of time one is physically away from home. Time-based stress happens when the allocation of time spent in work makes it difficult to meet the requirements of family role. This can happen both in terms of quantity of time devoted to work and family and in the quality of time spent in either domain. Thus, in the case of career-oriented couples, the demands on time come directly from the competing worlds of career and home (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1989; Kalliath *et al*, 2011). Given the multiple roles and responsibilities, the married couples have to constantly negotiate to meet these contending demands.

**Table 4: Time-Related Stress across Gender**

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Level of time-related stress	Low	20 (29.9)	13 (10.3)	33 (17.1)
	Medium	39 (58.2)	95 (75.4)	134 (69.4)
	High	8 (11.9)	18 (14.3)	26 (13.5)

Source: Sample Survey (2012-13)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate corresponding percentages.

Table 4 looks at the level of time-related stress across gender for the working professionals in our survey. On the whole, it is evident from the data that there is a gender difference in levels of stress experienced by men and women with regard to time-related strains. Close to 90 per cent of the females in the sample reported medium to high level of time-related stress while among men it was 70 per cent. Overall, women reported a greater tendency of experiencing time-related stress as evidenced by a chi-square value of 11.80 at a significance level of 0.001.

### Bringing Work Home

Time-related stress is also related to the respondent being unavailable to his/her spouse even when physically present at home. This can happen when the respondent or the spouse brings work home after office hours. For the purpose of analysis, the frequency of working from home after office hours by both spouses was constructed in such a way that if one spouse worked from home more frequently than the other (or vice versa), the higher frequency was taken as the value. This is done because the couple gets less time together irrespective of who brings work home more frequently. The respondent

was asked how often he/she and the spouse worked from home after office hours. The answer categories ranged from 'never' to 'almost every day'. For example, not being physically present for significant occasions at home and not being able to give quality time to the family (e.g. Holding a conference call during family time, bringing work home) – both will result in time-based strain.

**Table 5: Bringing Work Home across Gender**

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Bringing work Home	Almost everyday	14 (13.6)	17 (12.7)	31 (13.1)
	Most days in a month	19 (18.4)	12 (9.0)	31 (13.1)
	Some days in a month	30 (29.1)	50 (37.3)	80 (33.8)
	Never	40 (38.8)	55 (41)	95 (40.1)

**Source:** Sample Survey (2012-13)

**Note:** Numbers in parentheses indicate corresponding percentages.

Table 5 presents the occurrence of time-based strain due to bringing work home presented across gender. The gender difference in bringing work home was not statistically significant. About a similar percentage of men (13.6) and women (12.7) admitted to bringing work home almost daily. However, it is important to consider that in a largely patriarchal society like India, the additional household responsibilities are generally the forte of women, leading to greater time based strain for wives than husbands. Around 40 per cent of both men and women reported that they never brought work home. Being continuously connected to work by either of the spouses will diminish the quality family time available to the couple, which can have implications for the overall health of their marital relationship.

## Marital Quality

Marital quality is a key concept explaining the happiness of a marriage. As described earlier, a culturally relevant marital scale was adopted for understanding the quality of marital relationship among working professionals. Thus, the total Marital Quality Score was obtained by adding the score of each response in the Marital Quality Scale, after reverse-coding the negatively worded items. The score can range from 50 to 200 with higher scores indicating lower marital quality. The scores obtained in the present sample ranged from 52 to 164. The mean of the scores was 81.5 with a standard deviation of 22.8.

The norms for different levels of quality were arrived at by Shah (1991) using a normative sample, which reported similar mean (81.5) and standard deviation (22.8). Since the mean and standard deviation are similar to the norms of the Marital Quality Scale, the present study adopted the same standards. Thus, a score of at least 99 is considered an indicator of poor marital life quality and a score of 60 or less indicates absence of major disruption in marital quality (Shah, 1991). The internal consistency as measured by Cronbach Alpha was 0.9 indicating good consistency and reliability of the scale in the study.

**Table 6: Marital Quality by Gender**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Marital Quality</b>	High Quality (20-59)	36 (34.6)	19 (14.2)	55 (23.1)
	Medium Quality (60-98)	45 (43.3)	73 (54.5)	118 (49.6)
	Poor Quality (99-200)	23 (22.1)	42 (31.3)	65 (27.3)

**Source:** Sample Survey (2012-13)

**Note:** Numbers in parentheses indicate corresponding percentages.

As seen in Table 6, about half of the respondents are in a medium quality marriage. About 27.3 per cent of the respondents reported having poor quality marriages indicating difficulties in adjustment in their married life. About 23 per cent claimed to have a marriage without major strains and conflicts.

The gender-wise division of the score indicates that males generally have reported a high level of contentment regarding their married life, which is in line with existing research studies (Clements and Swensen, 2000). However, in both medium and poor quality, the share of women reporting less contentment is higher than that of men. Women do seem to experience a high level of discontent in marital relationship as evident from their high percentage in the category of poor quality. This could be due to the growing expectations of educated women about marriage, or because women are just more vocal than men in expressing their discontent. It could also be that men actually do enjoy their experience of married life more than women, possibly due to the favourable patriarchal norms that may be active in their households.

### **Marital Quality and Family Composition**

Families of origin and affinal homes can be both a source of solace and struggle. It is possible that the family of origin was a greater solace to the wife in a typical traditionally arranged marriage, especially if there is strain in the relationship between husband and wife due to conflicts with the affinal kin (Srinivas, 1999: 141-143). However, in an urban set-up, the wife may not have to deal with difficult affinal kith and kin in the same household, and at the same time her own parents may not also be easily accessible to the wife, thus depriving her of a potential alternative source of comfort in loneliness and relationship strains. The proximity and extent of intervention from the extended family and the attitude of the couples towards it are potential sources of issues of adjustment for the couples in India. It is important to analyse how different compositions of family have associations with overall marital quality. The presence of children is said to have a positive impact on the stability of the relationship, but it seems to take a toll on the satisfaction level of the couple especially since the time spent alone together is less.

**Table 7: Marital Quality and Composition of Family**

Item	Categories	Nuclear: Couple and children only	Extended: With in- laws/others	Total
Marital Quality Score	High Quality	41 (27.9)	14 (15.4)	55 (23.1)
	Medium Quality	75 (51)	43 (47.3)	118 (49.6)
	Poor Quality	31 (21.1)	34 (37.4)	65 (27.3)

**Source:** Sample Survey (2012-13)

**Note:** Numbers in parentheses indicate corresponding percentages.

As seen in Table 7, nuclear families reported greater proportion of high quality marriages compared to other families. Conversely, more than one-third of those who lived with in-laws/others reported poor quality in their marriages. This result indicates the growing desire for greater autonomy and individualisation of career-oriented couples, and lesser dependence on their extended families to achieve positive marital outcomes.

### Marital Quality and Religion

Religion could be a factor that alleviates tension between persons and at the same time, it could also trigger conflicts. Though inter-religious marriages are fairly uncommon at pan-India levels, those from urban areas and with higher education tend to be the majority in such marriages (Goli, Singh and Sekher, 2013). There are two divergent views on the influence of religious difference on marital satisfaction. For instance, Henrich (1991) was of the view that some kind of faith (in God) was more important, irrespective of the religion of the couple. However, Litcher and Carmalt (2009) stress that when couples share similar faith and beliefs, it would act as a positive force for marital quality. Table 8 presents marital quality as reported by couples with regard to differences in religious orientation between the couples.

**Table 8: Marital Quality by Religious Difference within couples**

Item	Categories	Same Religion	Different Religion	Total
Marital Quality Score	High Quality	55 (26.3)	0 (0)	55 (23.1)
	Medium Quality	115 (55)	3 (10.3)	118 (49.6)
	Poor Quality	39 (18.7)	26 (89.7)	65 (27.3)

**Source:** Sample Survey (2012-13)

**Note:** Numbers in parentheses indicate corresponding percentages.

As presented in Table 8, spouses who shared the same religious faith reported having higher marital quality. Around 90 per cent of the couples who belonged to different religions reported poor marital quality, thereby suggesting that differences in religious backgrounds had a significant influence on marital quality. Different understandings of religion and spirituality may impact different areas of married life such as commitment, parenting, leisure, finance and support-seeking mechanisms (Ortega *et al*, 1988).

## Marital Quality and Duration of Marriage

Studies have found that marital disagreements and conflicts decline with an increase in length of marriage (Levenson *et al*, 1993). Long-term marriages may make the couple more tolerant of each other or give them a greater understanding of what each one wants, thus leading to fewer disagreements and greater satisfaction (Robinson and Blanton, 1993). It is also possible that the longer the duration of marriage, the greater the chances for the couple to be accustomed to one another and thus, also reducing the cause for arguments (Johnson *et al*, 1992). The length of a marriage can also mirror how old the couple is. Older couples may argue less with each other simply because they have fewer issues to fight about (Zietlow and Sillars, 1988). Younger couples may have more conflicts because of the pressure of ensuring financial stability for their future as a family (Mirowski and Ross, 1999). Long-married couples are likely to be less expressive about their points of view, or less prone to be upset about being disagreed with, thus reducing the scope of arguments (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, and Novacek 1987).

**Table 9: Marital Quality by Duration of Marriage**

Item	Categories	Up to 5 years	6 to 10 years	More than 10 years	Total
Marital Quality Score	High Quality	14 (19.2)	4 (12.1)	37 (28.5)	55 (23.3)
	Medium Quality	34 (46.6)	15 (45.5)	69 (53.1)	118 (50)
	Poor Quality	25 (34.2)	14 (42.4)	24 (18.5)	63 (26.7)

**Source:** Sample Survey (2012-13)

**Note:** Numbers in parentheses indicate corresponding percentages.

As seen in Table 9, couples married for more than 10 years reported relatively higher marital quality. Poorer marital quality was observed in couples married for a period between 6 and 10 years. Around 34 per cent of the couples who reported poorer quality were married for less than 5 years. Couples who married in the recent past may expect a more egalitarian relationship compared to those who married many years ago. The couples in longer marriages are likely to share the ideology of traditional gendered roles even within dual career marriages and may tend to disagree less with regard to each one's roles, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and quality than the younger couples. Those in the initial years of marriage are also younger than the others, and are also likely to have greater focus on their career. Some level of youthful idealism, inexperience in dealing with differences that arise, and demands of a career pursuit at its peak can leave the younger couples with less time and energy to invest in their relationship. The high quality experienced among the young couples takes a hit after some years only to rise again after 10 years indicating a curvilinear relationship between marital quality and duration of marriage. Studies that use lifecycle perspective in studying marital quality have shown that "a curvilinear relationship between family stage and some aspects of marital quality is about as close to being certain as anything is in the social sciences" (Glen, 1990: 823).

## Relationship of Marital Quality with Selected Variables

Marital quality is associated positively with a couple's reports of satisfaction and happiness in their marital relationship (Li and Fung, 2011). As discussed, the concept of marital quality is multi-dimensional and is influenced by a wide variety of both individual and societal factors. In this analysis, an attempt is made to examine the association between marital quality and other factors that have been assumed to influence the quality of marriages. Pearson's correlation coefficient method was used to analyse the association of marital quality with other variables. The correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to +1, indicating both the strength and the direction of the relationship between the variables. The correlation of Marital Quality with variables for which data were collected at interval level are shown in Table 10.

**Table 10: Association between Marital Quality and Selected Variables**

Variable	Correlation Coefficient
Age of Respondent	.167**
Work-related absence (Self)	-.357*
Work-related absence (Spouse)	-.370*
Duration of Marriage	.161*

**Source:** Sample Survey (2012-13)

**Note:** \*\* Significant at .05 level, \* Significant at .01 level.

Studies have shown that age has a strong and consistent relationship with marital quality (Umberson *et al*, 2005). According to Umberson *et al* (2005), the couple may become emotionally resilient as they get older, and may thereby face fewer marital difficulties and conflicts leading to better marital outcomes. The age at marriage has been shown to be the single most consistent factor in predicting marital stability in the West (Heaton, 2002). As seen in Table 10, the age of the respondent has a positive and statistically significant association with Marital Quality. Age at marriage could be related also with the level of education and the income of the individual. Thus, the influence of age at marriage could be mediated by the presence of other variables that also have a positive impact on the quality of marriage. In fact, in our study the age at marriage was negatively correlated with the duration of marriage (figures not reported) indicating that postponing marriages is a more recent phenomenon; and that among our respondents, those with a higher age at marriage are among those of low duration in marriage. Therefore, it was decided not to consider the age at marriage for correlation analysis.

The correlation analysis shows that marital quality and duration of marriage are positively and significantly correlated. The correlation coefficient of duration suggests that the greater the length of marriage, the higher is the level of reported quality in marital life. This is in line with other studies in the literature (Levenson *et al*, 1993). An increase in the duration of marriages brings about improved intimacy as the couple is aware of each other's likes and dislikes, thereby leading to a closer relationship as a couple (Hinchliff and Gott, 2004). Moreover, it is likely that since our respondents are only from

intact marriages, it may suffer from a selection bias. It is possible that those who currently have a long-duration marriage are only those who have had a relatively contented married life and that the low quality marriages may have been removed from the population (Glenn 1990, 1998) or are unlikely to volunteer as respondents. Nevertheless, considering the negligible divorce rate in India, the correlation between duration of marriage and marital quality is worth noting. Another aspect regarding the duration of marriage is the correlation it tends to have with the age of the respondent. Many studies use only one of these variables since both are usually strongly correlated to each other. Both the variables are reported separately since the age at marriage in our sample did not follow any strict pattern.

The respondent's and the partner's absence from home for job-related work has a highly significant negative correlation with marital quality among working professionals. Hughes *et al* (1992) found that extended work time leading to their absence at home had a negative impact on marital relationship especially in cases where children were present. Therefore, the daily hours away from home of both the respondent and the spouse seem to significantly contribute to poor marital quality among career-oriented couples in the survey.

## Conclusion

The main purpose of the paper was to examine the quality of marital relationships among working professionals in an urban context. The results of the study on marital quality among working professionals possess significant relevance in the context of increasing career focus among couples today in Indian society, owing to the changing socio-cultural environment arising from modernisation. Specifically, working professionals experience higher levels of stress leading to time-based strain, affecting the quality of their married life.

The study used the Marital Quality Scale developed by Shah (1991) to examine the level of satisfaction and quality among married working professionals keeping in mind the cultural relevance of the scale in an Indian context. Overall, there was a total of 238 married professionals (104 males and 134 females) in the sample belonging to diverse socio-economic backgrounds, professions and family types. According to the survey, age at marriage for women is still lower than that of males, reflecting the societal gendered norms.

The analysis of marital quality across gender suggests that higher levels of quality and satisfaction were reported by men compared to women respondents. The finding that more women than men find their marriages unsatisfying is worthy of attention. The finding could point to two possibilities: it could be that the source of satisfaction for a married working woman has shifted from the traditionally prescribed role of caretaker to a new understanding of marriage itself. In this case, the urban working women are shown to be more dissatisfied with their marriages than urban working men. It can also be an expression of women becoming more aware of their right to be happy in a marriage, and family-related institutions not being able to meet the expectations of the new career woman. Dissatisfied wives could also be the result of husbands who do not go beyond their stereotypical understanding of traditional wives. A second possibility is that what is new now is not dissatisfaction itself, but its expression. Murickan (2002) had studied the effect of unfulfilled expectations in marriage. A vast majority of his female respondents expected to find a companionate partner in marriage, but a

good number of them encountered a dominant-dependent relationship. Yet, 98 per cent of them reported to be satisfied with the actual situation. So, though wives have been shown to be more open to share their distress and other negative emotions than husbands (Mirgain and Cordova, 2007), the cultural ideal of gendered role took precedence in defining the experience of marriage as positive or otherwise. Our data may indicate a greater willingness to express the unhappiness regarding wives' marital experiences at least among the urban career women. This feeling may be further augmented when combined with awareness that she is being deprived of what she considers to be rightfully hers in the marriage.

The respondents reported poorer marital quality when staying with extended families than when they were in nuclear families. Couples who were married for less than 5 years reported poorer marital satisfaction, suggesting that younger couples may have greater expectations of a more egalitarian relationship. The analysis of correlation shows a positive correlation between marital quality and duration of marriage suggesting that marital quality seems to increase over the course of the marriage. The literature predicted a curvilinear relationship between duration and quality of marriage, though it can be argued, based on the low divorce rates in India that not all marriages that endure are of high quality. Among our respondents, the relationship between duration and quality agreed with the existing studies elsewhere. It may be that the career-couples tend to be better educated and aware than average Indians, and may terminate unfulfilled/unhappy marriages sooner. Career-oriented couples experience time-based strains due to role overload both at home and workplace, which has implications for marital quality.

The results bring into focus the level of discontent experienced by younger marriages and its strong relationship with the lack of time that the spouses get for each other, especially in the context of a career focus. Discontent is probably closely related to an unmeasured variable in our study: the expectations that the couple bring into their marriage. One could reasonably assume that the younger couples probably experience greater stress attempting to negotiate the demands of building up a career and coming to terms with not having their expectations of marriage fulfilled. The expectations with which the couple enter into marriage, the strains caused to the relationship due to the unrelenting demands of career on their couple-time, and the possible role played by the support systems and societal factors — all contribute to how a working professional perceives his/her marriage at a given point. The results of the study are indicative of how the interface between a relatively newly-discovered career focus and the traditional imperative of marriage result in strains which the participants need to learn, over time, to cope with. How this feat is achieved, despite the demands of the extended families, is worthy of further investigation in greater depth.

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