

THE CONFLICTS OF MARRIED INDIVIDUALS LIVING AWAY FROM THEIR PARTNERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Living away from one's spouse due to certain reasons is now a growing trend, particularly in urban cultures. The study aimed to understand the psychological and relational conflicts that people experience in marriage due to living apart from each other. The study is a qualitative thematic analysis conducted on 134 individuals who provided open-ended responses. The results indicate overriding themes, and they are psychological distress, lack of communication, role overload, marital conflict, effects on mental health, and social and cultural pressures. The findings further highlight that living away from spouses is a stressor of emotional well-being, marital functioning, and mental health. The multidimensional and sociocultural norms enhance the stressors, especially among women. The study acknowledges the importance of approaching mental health interventions in a culturally sensitive manner and recognizes the potential of the psychosocial assessment tool to evolve based on empirical evidence, highlighting the need to develop indigenous mental health assessment tools.

1. Introduction

Marriage is also a social institution that is highly regarded as the one that offers emotional support, companionship, and psychological security to persons throughout the lifespan (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In collectivistic societies like Pakistan, marital relationships are rooted in social, cultural and family expectations which define the roles, duties and the interaction with other people (Triandis, 1995). But growing economic demands, labor migrations and occupational demands frequently force spouses to spend long spells apart. On the one hand, such arrangements can provide financial security and career opportunities; however, on the other hand, they can also cause immense psychological disturbances, emotional isolation, and relationship tension in couples (Merolla, 2019; Jiang & Hancock, 2021).

Attachment theory defines the psychological distress, loneliness and feelings of emotional insecurity experienced by married couples who reside outside of the marriage. Physical separation interferes with the attachment bonds which causes anxiety, emotional regulation and lack of security especially seen in the theme of psychological distress and marital conflict (Bowlby, 1988).

Past studies show that emotional loneliness, stress, less satisfaction in the marriage, and undermined mental health are related to physical distance with a spouse (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Among long-distance marriage couples, communication problems, role conflict, and emotional distance lack are common. Furthermore, sociocultural requirements especially gender norms can contribute to these obstacles through raising the

level of social doubt, as well as constraining the supply of emotional support (Triandis, 1995). Although there has been increased literature on long-distance relationships in the international literature, very little qualitative research has been done in investigation of these experiences in Pakistani sociocultural context. The knowledge of such lived experiences can be used to inform culturally responsive interventions and also create indigenous psychological assessment instruments (Naz & Malik, 2022, Noor & Batool, 2023, Siddiqui et al., 2024). Thus, the objective of the present research was to consider the conflicts of married people who do not live with their partners through a qualitative thematic method. The emerging trend in empirical studies has concentrated more on the psychological and relational implications of employment, migration or educational living away of spouses. The publications of the past decade highlight that the existence without a spouse is linked to increasing emotional loneliness, stress, and declining marital satisfaction (Merolla, 2019; Jiang & Hancock, 2021). The technological progress in communication has made contact between partners often frequent, but studies show that virtual interaction does not entirely replace the emotional presence and physical closeness especially with long-term distances (Jiang and Hancock, 2021; Merolla, 2019; Stafford, 2010). Recent qualitative and mixed-method research shows that long-term absence of a spouse leads to emotional dysregulation, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, particularly when women have to take up responsibilities of the household and care on their own (Rehman et al., 2021; Noor & Batool, 2023). Role expectations, gender-based roles in collectivistic societies serve as factors that increase the burden, and women tend to have more instances of social scrutiny, emotional exhaustion, and role strain (Triandis, 1995; Rehman et al., 2021; Naz & Malik, 2022). Moreover, modern studies emphasize role overload as a major factor that predicts psychological distress in married people who stay live away (Khan & Aftab, 2022). Cumulative stress can be caused by single-handed decision-

making, financial management, and parenting, and in turn end up consuming coping resources as well as have an adverse impact on the emotional well-being (Khan et al., 2022; Rehman et al., 2021; Voydanoff, 2005).

Recent relational studies also emphasize the effect of communication quality, but not frequency. Jiang & Hancock (2021) identified that the misinterpretations, emotional unavailability, and unresolved conflicts have a more negative impact on marital satisfaction than physical distance. Loss of trust and emotional detachment are the obvious results of the lack of proper communication strategies.

In the Pakistani realms, these experiences have been explained in little depth through qualitative studies conducted recently. Nevertheless, recent research in the area indicates that sociocultural norms, family intrusion, and social pressures contribute to the conflict related to the marriage and limit the expression of emotions, especially among women (Naz & Malik, 2022; Siddiqui et al., 2024). These results highlight the importance of qualitative studies based on cultures to document experiences of people and shape indigenous interventions.

1.1 Rationale

Residing separately with your partner has become a more and more popular marriage habit on economic hardships, globalization, migration, and career mobility. Although this phenomenon is becoming more and more frequent, it is still under-researched in the context of the Pakistani sociocultural background, especially through the prism of lived psychological and relational experiences (Merolla, 2019; Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Most of the currently available research is based on quantitative indicators that are created in Western settings and may be inadequate in terms of capturing culturally specific stressors, including extended family expectations, gender expectations, and social condemnation manifested in collectivistic societies (Triandis, 1995; Naz & Malik, 2022). Additionally, few qualitative studies have investigated the effects of extended marital separation on emotional well-

being, marital relationship on the mental well-being of South Asians (Rehman et al., 2021; Noor & Batool, 2023).

This study is thus noteworthy because it provides a qualitative analysis of conflict that is faced by married people who are not living together. The study provides empirical data that should be used in formulating culturally sensitive counseling interventions and indigenous psychological assessment instruments because it defines culturally entrenched psychological and relational themes. Mental-health professionals, marriage counselors, and policy-makers operating in a collectivistic and family-centered culture may use the results as well (Jiang & Hancock 2021; Khan & Aftab 2022).

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the present study were:

1. To explore the psychological conflicts experienced by married individuals living away from their partners.
2. To identify relational challenges, including communication gaps and marital conflict, associated with spousal living away.
3. To examine the impact of role overload on emotional well-being and mental health.
4. To understand the influence of social and cultural pressures on individuals living in spousal distance.
5. To provide empirical grounding for culturally sensitive mental health interventions and indigenous assessment tool development.

2.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

Inclusion Criteria

Legally married individuals only

Temporarily residing (at least 3 months) without spouse (when working, studying or migrated)

Adults aged 20 years to 35

Skillful understanding of the language to give significant

1.3 Open-ended Research Questionnaire

What are the psychological challenges experienced by married individuals living away from their spouses, and how do they navigate conflicts within their marital relationship in that duration?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The design of the qualitative research was used to capture the subjective experiences of the participants.

2.2 Participant Recruitment

The purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit 134 participants. Married people who were now living away with their spouses because of occupational, educational or migration causes were invited to take part. The process of recruitment was conducted via the online medium and social networking sites that are popular in the Pakistani setting and guarantees that people of varied backgrounds were reached.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

An open-ended qualitative question was used to collect the data, which was aimed at obtaining rich subjective experiences. Participants were invited to write, at their own pace, without any time restrictions or word limits and to be open and honest, to capture emotional and relational aspects of their experiences as well as the sociocultural aspects of their experiences in their own words. All responses were collected electronically to avoid inconvenience, confidentiality and decreased social desirability bias.

Exclusion Criteria

Unmarried, divorced, or widowed individuals

Individuals living together with their spouse at the time of data collection

Participants below 20 years of age

Responses with severe language barriers or

Inclusion Criteria

written answers.

Voluntary participation with informed consent

Complete, substantive, and relevant open-ended responses

Narratives containing psychological, emotional, relational, or sociocultural conflict related to spousal separation

Single valid submission per participant

Exclusion Criteria

unclear interpretation

Lack of clear consent or unwilling participation

Incomplete, blank, one-word, or irrelevant responses

Responses unrelated to marital separation or psychological conflict

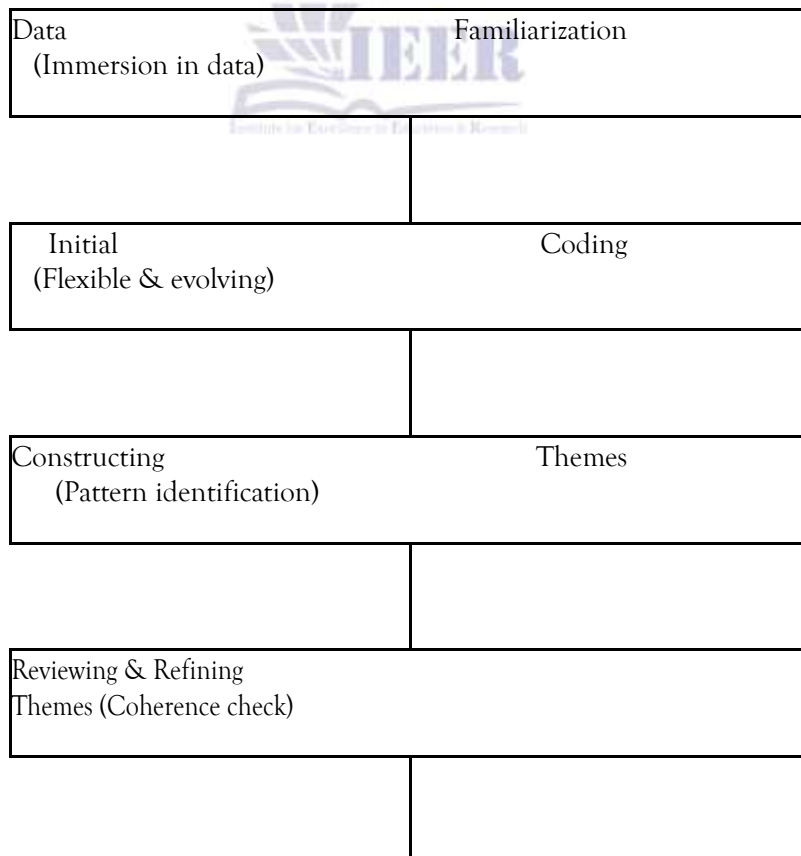
Duplicate or multiple entries from the same participant

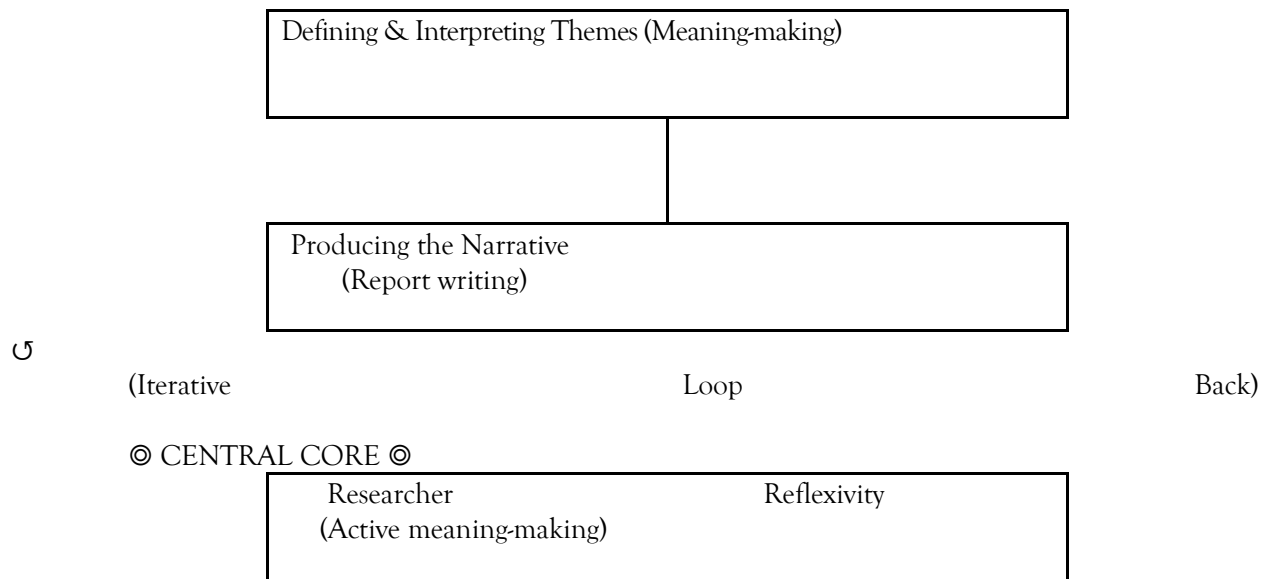
2.5 Method of Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as developed by Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke (2019, 2021). This approach moves

beyond the rigid six-phase structure (2006) and adopts a flexible, iterative, and interpretive analytic process. An inductive, data-driven approach was used to ensure that themes emerged directly from participants' narratives.

Table1: Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) Flowchart by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2019, 2021)





inductive, data-driven approach was used so that themes emerged directly from participants' narratives rather than from pre-existing theories. Credibility was ensured through repeated cross-checking of codes and themes. Reflexivity was maintained to minimize researcher bias, and all interpretations were grounded strictly in participants' textual data.

2.6 Procedure

The study was conducted through a systematic and ethically guided qualitative research procedure to explore the psychological, relational, and sociocultural conflicts experienced by married individuals living away from their partners. The data for the present study were collected through open-ended qualitative responses obtained from married individuals who were living away from their spouses due to occupational, educational, or migration-related reasons. The participants were contacted via web-based surveys and social networking networks to target people of various geographical and socio-economic backgrounds. The process was anonymous and promoted truthful self-disclosure of personal experiences without the fear of being judged by society. One thirty and forty-four valid responses were then sifted out against incompleteness and irrelevance. The responses were presented in brief paragraphs based on

elaborate narratives. These written answers constituted the major qualitative information on the thematic analysis. All the responses were kept in secure password-protected files, and no identified information (names or contact details) was gathered to preserve confidentiality and ethical standards. The gathered textual feedback was summed up, scrutinized to ensure that no data was lost and systematized into one dataset. Rejected responses without any pertinent information or partial stories were filtered off before analysis. A numerical code was attached to each response in order to be anonymous but to allow a systematic analysis.

2.7 Ethical Considerations and Approval

Ethical standards of the psychological research were strictly adhered to before data collection. All participants were involved in it voluntarily and informed consent was given to all of them. The purpose of the study was well explained to the participants as well as the nature of the questions and their answers as well as their right to withdraw freely at any point without any penalty. No personal data were gathered, and all the answers were anonymized to guarantee privacy and security of data.

3. Findings

The thematic analysis resulted in the development of six general themes of psychological, relational, and sociocultural conflicts which have been experienced by the married people who live off their partners. These themes are concerned with the objectives of the studies and relates to the guiding hypotheses.

Theme 1: Psychological Distress

One of the main themes in psychological distress was the emotional and psychological pressure of the long living away of marital relations. The stories of the interviewees revealed that participants were in a continuous state of stress, were alone, and were imbalanced emotionally, which affected overall wellbeing.

Emotional Stress

Interviewees tended to recount how they were subjected to emotional stress all the time due to the daily life they had to cope with without the spouse. Statements such as

“My partner often face emotional conflict and stress” (P03, P17) and *“I feel emotionally drained most of the time.”* (P11)

suggest that the strain of emotions was not a short-term phenomenon but a persistent one. The participants mentioned their feeling overwhelmed, emotionally exhausted, and incapable of rest, which indicates that the spousal absence causes emotional imbalance and lack of coping skills.

Inner Emotional Conflict

Participants showed inner emotional conflict as they tried to reconcile their emotional needs with their circumstances. The statement

“They experience emotional and psychological conflicts”(P08, P26) and *“I want to stay strong but inside I feel broken.”* (P14)

indicates ambivalence, insecurities and the repressed. Respondents reported feeling conflicted between being emotionally strong and admitting their vulnerability to emotional discomfort and tension.

Feeling Alone in Daily Life

The sense of being lonely was very pronounced throughout the transcripts. Participants stated that

“Being married I often feel alone especially in daily life,” (P05, P31)

insisting on emotional lonesomeness regardless of marital status. Lack of daily companionship, emotional exchange and presence of a spouse exacerbated the emptiness and detachment feelings, and contributed to the emotional difficulty of performing daily activities.

Psychological Burden

Psychological burden was the accumulated effect of stress and loneliness and unmanaged feelings. Participants noted that

“It affects my overall happiness and mental peace,” (P09)

denoting a continued feeling of weightiness and emotional burden. This load was observed in form of rumination, emotional exhaustion, and lack of mental tranquility which leads to distress in the long term.

Theme 2: Communication Gaps

The gaps in communication were found to be the key relational problem increasing the level of emotional distance between the partners residing living away.

Lack of Understanding

According to the participants, poor emotional presence resulted in misperceptions and the lack of satisfaction of their emotional needs. The statement

“I have lack of understanding.” (P12)

represents the perception of the participants that their emotions and plight were not neither completely acknowledged nor legitimized by their partners.

Communication Gap

Lack of frequent, meaningful communication was referred to as a frustration. Participants reported that

“Our communication gaps lead to frustration and stress,” (P02, P19)

emphasizing the role of the frequency and shallow communication undermining emotional bonding and enhancing friction in relationships.

Misunderstandings

It was characterized by poor communication and misunderstandings because of low interaction. Statements such as

“We are not present for each other emotionally” (P21) describe how emotional inaccessibility contributed to the development of misunderstandings, which led to aggravation and emotional disconnection.

Theme 3: Role Overload

Role overload became one of the widespread and enduring stressors in the lives of those who lived away with their spouses. The lack of support by the spouse also forced people to take up several roles at the same time, which led to emotional, cognitive, and physical fatigue. The interviews with participants showed that role overload was not reduced to the task burden only but involved emotional workload, responsibility to make decisions, and self-regulation, which had a significant impact on the psychological health of the participants.

Multiple Role Performance

The participants also spoke repeatedly of the need to fulfill multiple roles simultaneously, such as taking care of the home, caring and nurturing, planning finances and maintaining emotions. The statement

“We manage everything by ourselves” (P04, P16) is a lived practice of experiencing multiple responsibilities without rest or collective responsibility. This variety of roles meant that participants had to continually alternate tasks without necessarily taking breaks and with little emotional maintenance. With time, this contributed toward exhaustions, emotional discharges, and lessening time on a personal basis. Respondents stated that lack of role-sharing put a greater strain on them to be functional at

all times with little room to take care of themselves or express emotions.

Financial Responsibilities

Economic obligation was also the primary contributor towards role overload especially in the households where the missing spouse was traditionally or usually involved in economic decision making. Participants stated that

“Responsibilities increase when spouse is not present,” (P10)

emphasizing the pressure of budgeting, controlling costs, and making financial choices on your own. This weight could be riddled with fear of mistakes and worry about their financial well-being. Financial strains in most cases were coupled with emotional ones, as finances were directly correlated with family balance and future life planning, increasing the presence of pressure and vulnerability.

Parenting Without Partner Support

Parenting was found to be particularly overwhelming when there was no spousal involvement. The statement

“I have to raise children alone” (P07)

brings the emotional and practical issues of being single parents. Respondents indicated a challenge in disciplining, emotionally nurturing, teaching, and taking care of their daily lives without becoming emotionally reassured or making joint decisions with them. The support of partners was missing, which resulted in emotional fatigue, guilt, and self-doubt especially during making parenting decisions without the support of the partners. The respondents pointed out that lack of joint custody contributed to stress and lack of emotional strength.

Decision-Making Burden

Role overload made it an independent psychological burden of decision-making. Participants noted that

“Managing household and other duties becomes difficult for me,” (P22)

a symptom of thinking hard, having no consultation or reassurance when making

continuous decisions. Participants were pressured to make the right decisions on their own in matters that were as simple as changing toilet paper, and as big as making serious life decisions. This task could be accompanied by excessive thinking, anxiety, and fear of adverse effects. The ongoing need to make decisions was a source of mental exhaustion and increased stress which confirmed the sense of being isolated and experiencing emotional strain.

Theme 4: Marital Conflict

Marital conflict was a major consequence of long term physical and emotional distance between the two spouses. The accounts of the participants indicated that the decreased communication, the emotional unfulfilled needs, and the absence of experiences together slowly diminished the harmony of the marriage. The lack of emotional contact and physical presence on a daily basis provided the susceptibility to lack of understanding, emotional discontent, and relationship instability.

Trust Issues

Trust Issues Participants were always able to cite the development of trust-related issues as a direct impact of the physical living away. The statement “Trust issues develop” (P01, P18)

indicates an increase in insecurity, uncertainty about the commitment of a partner and fear of emotional or relationship infidelity. Lack of communication and reassurance increased the level of suspicion and emotional uncertainty. The participants reported that they were always thinking about what the partner was doing and what the partner wanted to do, which meant distance interfered with the experience of safety and emotional security in the marriage.

Aggression

Aggression was often cited as an emotional reaction to frustration that lasted long, unmet expectations, and even stifled emotions. The short, yet impactful statement

“My aggression increases during conversations.” (P13)

is greater irritability and emotional eruptions and escalation of conflict in interactions. The respondents observed that emotional volatility was caused by unresolved stress, emotional support deficit, and communication distances. Aggression was common even to the extent of happening during conversation with the spouse or in pure response to the external stressor, and this is a part of the further exacerbation of the marital relationship.

Emotional Dissatisfaction

The lack of fulfilled emotional needs and lack of intimacy were the causes that led to the emotional dissatisfaction. The statement

“It weakens the bond over time.” (P25)

It destroys the connection in the long run. is a gradual denial of emotional attachment. The interviewed ones argued that they felt unsupported, neglected emotionally, and disappointed and had no emotions in the relationship. This was not a sudden kind of dissatisfaction but was built up over time, since continual emotional disengagement lowered marriage satisfaction and emotional satisfaction.

Weak Emotional Bond

Participants reported experiencing a significant loss of emotional attachment with low rates of interaction and shared emotional experience. The statement

“We feel emotionally distant now.” (P29)

lack of daily companionship and emotional intimacy were reduced as a result of poor communication and lack of contact with each other. With time, participants said that they felt emotionally detached with their spouse and that relationship had become more formal or superficial. This poor connection diminished the emotional dependency on the spouse and further increased relational absence.

Reduced Intimacy

Less intimacy was cited as a key issue influencing the quality of marriage. Participants emphasized that

“Intimacy issues affect relationship satisfaction,” (P06)

emphasizing emotional and physical aspects of intimacy. Physical absence constrained love and intimacy and diminished expressiveness, whereas emotional distance diminished susceptibility and un-restrictedness. Respondents claimed that a lack of intimacy was one of the reasons why they were dissatisfied with the marriage, felt lonely, and were emotionally unfulfilled in the marriage.

Theme 5: Mental Health Impact

Mental health challenges became the cumulative effect of the prolonged psychological stress, strain of relationships, and job overload. The stories of the participants identified that there was a progressive weakness to emotional insecurity, nervousness, and weak psychological health in the long-term.

Stress and Anxiety

Participants often had increased anxiety and stress because of extended uncertainty and emotional distress. The statement “*It leads to stress and sadness.*” (P15) is an indicator of chronic anxiety, emotional disruption, sadness related to living away with a spouse. There were various sources of stress, such as insecurity in relationships, more responsibilities and socially induced pressure, which led to chronic arousal in psychology.

Emotional Instability

Emotional instability was found through the descriptions of changing moods by participants, irritability, and emotional control problems. The statement “*It creates anxiety and emotional disturbance*” (P24) depicts difficulties with emotional regulation. The participants reported that they were emotionally overwhelmed and easily triggered and could not have emotional balance especially at the times of conflict or when alone.

Disturbed Mental Well-being

Those who participated reported a decrease in overall mental well-being consistently. The statement “*Affecting overall mental well-being*” (P30)

captures the cumulative psychological impact of prolonged emotional distress. Feelings of emotional exhaustion, low mood, and reduced psychological resilience were common, indicating increased vulnerability to mental health problems such as anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Theme 6: Social and Cultural Pressures

Social and cultural settings were a key determinant of participants experiences, especially in a collectivistic and patriarchal sociocultural setting. The demands of the society and cultural rules exacerbated emotional sufferings and reduced adaptive coping.

Social Judgment

Often, participants reported social scrutiny, criticism and judgment. The statement “*Society creates pressure*” (P20) is afraid of gossip, stigma and negative criticism. Subjects displayed increased self-consciousness and emotional suffering as a result of social questioning about their marital state and lifestyle that resulted in social withdrawal and emotional repression.

Cultural Expectations

Stress was greatly exacerbated by cultural norms and expectations. The statement “*Cultural expectations increase stress*” (P27) emphasizes the needs to hold together, sustain emotional, and social respectability through tough personal times. The participants were pressured into accepting the role and expectations of the traditional gender, which frequently meant sacrificing their emotional needs and health.

Gender-Based Pressure

The pressure by gender was more salient among women. The statement “*Women suffer more due to social norms*” (P28) is an unequal demand, more responsibility, and less emotional expression placed on women. There were more questions, role pressure, emotional repression among female respondents,

which strengthen stress and psychological susceptibility in a sociocultural setting.

Summary of Findings

This coding format is used to illustrate participant ID + thematic code + short analytic label, this is in accordance with Braun and Clarke-style thematic reporting to ensure findings remain systematic, transparent and audit traceable. The general findings show that

psychological distress, communication deficit, job overload, relationship conflict, a mental health consequence and sociocultural forces are two experiences that married people cannot do without. absence of their partners. All these themes represent a scenario in which there is a relationship between. the emotional health, the marital can be affected by the spouses living away and relationship-cultural settings. performance, and the psychological health.

Table 2: Themes and Sub-Themes that were detected during thematic analysis of conflicts. Married persons living away are those who experience this

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Interpretation
Psychological Distress	Emotional stress, inner conflict, loneliness, psychological burden	Participants reported persistent emotional distress marked by loneliness and inner conflict, indicating compromised emotional well-being due to prolonged spousal living away.
Communication Gaps	Lack of understanding, emotional unavailability, misunderstandings	Reduced quality and frequency of communication weakened emotional intimacy, resulting in frustration and misunderstandings within the marital relationship.
Role Overload	Multiple responsibilities, financial burden, single parenting, decision-making pressure	Absence of the partner increased role strain, forcing individuals to manage household, financial, and parental responsibilities independently, leading to exhaustion.
Marital Conflict	Trust issues, aggression, reduced intimacy, emotional dissatisfaction	Physical living away contributed to mistrust and emotional dissatisfaction, weakening marital bonds and increasing interpersonal conflict.
Mental Health Impact	Anxiety, sadness, emotional instability	The accumulation of emotional, relational, and practical stressors resulted in heightened anxiety, sadness, and emotional instability.
Social and Cultural Pressures	Social judgment, cultural expectations, gender-based pressure	Sociocultural expectations intensified psychological distress, with women reporting greater emotional burden due to societal judgment and gender norms.

4. Discussion

Discussion The research paper has discussed the psychological and relational impacts of the prolonged relational disruption within the present context of broken engagement, ongoing social criticism, and emotional distress. It was found that there were psychologically distressing themes of communication breakdown, role overload, marital and interpersonal conflict, mental health deterioration and sociocultural

pressure. All these themes indicate the multiple and compounding effect of relational loss in a social cultural context that endorses stigma and self-dismissal. As congruent to the current research, one of the major outcomes was psychological distress, implying the constant presence of sadness, loneliness, hopelessness, and emotional burden. According to current longitudinal studies, relational living away is a significant adverse factor in terms of emotional

well-being, and those who are affected tend to have significantly lower life satisfaction and become more susceptible to depressive symptoms (Bhutto et al., 2019; Osmond et al., 2023).

The present results are consistent with the observations to suggest that the emotional effect of loss of relationships is not short-lived, and could be continued when it is supplemented by social criticism and unsolved grief. The issue of communication gaps was found to be a primary cause of emotional conflicts and strain in relations. Respondents reported emotional distance, lack of understanding and unmet emotional needs especially during post separation. The studies also show that emotional availability and perceived responsiveness are more effective predictors of psychological adjustment (Ma et al., 2024, 2025), as compared to relationship status itself (Osmond et al., 2023). Lack of proper communication after the disruption in the relationship seems to enhance the sense of abandonment and frustration, which keeps the emotional distress. The role overload theme is an expression of the augmented emotional and pragmatic obligations that are undertaken in the lack of the relational support. The respondents indicated that they were overwhelmed with expectations and commitments, which was also confirmed by the recent research on mental load and work-family conflict. Barigozzi et al. (2025) highlight that accumulation of roles in the absence of sufficient emotional or social support is one of the primary factors that augment stress and emotional exhaustion. This overloading can lower the ability to cope as well as cause long-term psychological distress especially to people who are stress-sensitive. Marital strife and social stigma also added to the distress, with the participants feeling criticized, mistrusted, and having a low social status. According to sociological and psychological studies, relational dissolution is frequently the subject of the moral judgment, particularly in the collectivistic cultures, where marital status is directly connected to personal value (Metsä-Simola et al., 2024).

Continued exposure to criticism can strengthen maladaptive cognitive schemas such as self-blaming and worthlessness and make one more vulnerable to depressive symptomatology. Combined stressors, which included the mental health effects, were significant. The participants complained of increased levels of anxiety, emotional numbness, sleeping disorder, and lack of motivation. The empirical evidence suggests that the process of living away and relational loss is one of the significant contributors to the risk of mood and anxiety disorders, and the process of recovery depends on the social support (Abdelrady et al., 2025, 2026) and the processes of cognitive appraisals (Al-Adwan et al., 2022; Metsä-Simola et al., 2024).

The current results indicate that relational trauma that has not been addressed and social stress can slow down emotional healing and become the cause of long-term psychological discomfort. Lastly, sociocultural demands were very crucial in influencing the experiences of the participants. Stigmatization, the fear of being negatively evaluated and social expectations of marriage only exacerbated emotional pain and promoted social withdrawal. The study of cultural psychology emphasizes that in collectivistic cultures, relational breakdowns usually are also perceived as individual failures, which adds to the development of more shame and less help-seeking intentions (Khan et al., 2023; Ramzan et al., 2025, 2023, 2020). These forces can restrict access to social support and strengthening avoidance patterns and continue to contribute to psychological distress.

5. Conclusion

The results point out that there are complex psychological, relational, and cultural issues of married people who live apart with their partners. These are psychological distress, breakdown in communication, role overload, marital conflict, mental health factor, and sociocultural pressures, which are closely linked. The paper highlights the necessity of culturally sensitive mental care, marital therapy, and supportive measures. In addition, the identified themes offer an excellent

empirical basis by which indigenous, culturally based assessment instruments aimed at cognitive and emotionally empowering and marital adjustment can be created. All in all, the discussions of these limitations and further elaboration of the implications and recommendations mentioned above would help to form a more holistic view on the topic of spousal living away and support the creation of effective and culturally-specific mental health interventions.

6. Limitations of the Study

Although the current study could offer valuable contributions to the discussion of conflicts that married people living outside their marital partners face, it also has a number of limitations that should be considered.

- Use of open-ended qualitative responses may involve exaggeration, minimization, or selective disclosure based on participants' emotional state.
- Purposive sampling and online recruitment may exclude individuals with low internet access, literacy issues, or different socioeconomic backgrounds.
- The study did not living away analyze factors such as gender, age, duration of living away, or reason for separation, which may influence experiences differently.
- Data were collected at one point in time, preventing understanding of how psychological distress or marital conflict changes over time.
- Despite reflexivity and rigor, thematic analysis inherently involves subjective interpretation that may be influenced by cultural or theoretical assumptions.

7. Suggestions for Future Research

Due to the research findings and shortcomings, there are various recommendations that can be drawn as to the future research directions.

- Test the patterns of psychological distress, coping, and marital conflict change over time and discover patterns of resilience and recovery.

- Compare study between men and women to learn about unique stressors, unique coping styles, and support requirements.
- Research how long the separation time, the quality of communication, socioeconomic status, and the presence of children affect the psychological results.
- Test the effectiveness of CBT and IPT, family therapy, and culturally adapted models of counseling among persons living apart without spouses.
- Additional rural areas, different cultural areas and underrepresented groups will be included to enhance the generalizability and cultural relevance.

8. Implications of the Study

- Need for culturally sensitive counseling and marital therapy for individuals living apart from spouses.
- Mental health professionals should screen for stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion.
- CBT, IPT, and emotion-focused counseling can help manage loneliness, maladaptive thoughts, and communication issues.
- Family psychoeducation is important to reduce stigma, gender pressure, and family interference.
- Promote community awareness programs to normalize mental health concerns related to spousal living away.
- Encourage supportive workplace and migration policies such as counseling access, flexible schedules, and family reunification options.
- Develop indigenous and culturally adapted psychological assessment tools to capture local stressors (family pressure, social judgment, role overload).
- Vaguely, western measures need to be adapted or refined to collectivistic contexts.

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