

Body Image Dissatisfaction, Emotional Regulation, and Marital Satisfaction after Cesarean Delivery

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Abstract

Childbirth, often referred to as labour, parturition, or delivery, is the term used to describe the end of a pregnancy in which one or more infants leave the mother's body naturally or through a cesarean section. Strong feelings, both good and bad, might surface during childbirth, which can be a very emotional experience for a woman. The postpartum period, marked by physical changes and altered body image, often contributes to body image dissatisfaction among women. The current study was intended to find out the moderating role of emotional regulation (cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression) on body image dissatisfaction and marital satisfaction among women who have undergone cesarean delivery. A correlational research design was used and a sample of 120 females with cesarean delivery was selected through purposive sampling. The study result revealed that body image dissatisfaction negatively predicts marital satisfaction, cognitive reappraisal positively predicts marital satisfaction and expressive suppression negatively predicts marital satisfaction. Emotional regulation did not play the role of a moderator in the research. The results of the study can be used to educate therapists and medical professionals about the significance of treating body image issues and emotional control in postpartum care for women who have had cesarean sections.

Keywords: body image dissatisfaction, emotion regulation, marital satisfaction, cesarean delivery

Introduction

The family has consistently been one of the most prominent social structures in global history, making a considerable contribution to the development and stabilization of society. Marriage is the main form of social support and has numerous advantages for happiness and physical and mental well-being. Parenthood is a unique and wonderful experience for a couple after marriage. Spousal relationships take a new turn after childbirth, and child-rearing responsibilities and adjustments become the priorities of life. As a relationship develops into one of a family, parents learn to adapt to their new, challenging role. Prior marital adjustment is necessary for women to adjust to labour, delivery, and entering the postpartum stage.

A third of pregnant women suffer from a body image disorder, which is closely associated with both current and previous episodes of anxiety and depression. Brockman and Kashdan (2016) stated that daily emotion suppression had a different pattern from cognitive reappraisal. Not the negative daily effect, but the positive daily effect, was linked to cognitive reappraisal. Similarly, Mazzuca (2019) demonstrated that controlled emotional regulation and automatic emotional contagion processes both have independent and combined effects on marital satisfaction in long-wed couples and, to a certain extent, coincide in efforts to synchronize

couples' emotional linkage. In addition, Shahid and Kazmi (2016) investigated how emotional control affects marital satisfaction for which data was collected from 200 married couples from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The results of a study revealed that the key predictor of marital satisfaction was emotional regulation.

Moreover, collectivistic cultures, like Pakistan, prioritize expressive suppression, whereas individualistic cultures favour emotional expressiveness to control emotions. Mental illness, physical illness, and inadequate social and psychological adaptation can all be caused by emotional suppression. After a thorough analysis of the literature, the current study aims to find a relationship between body image dissatisfaction, emotional regulation, and marital satisfaction in females after cesarean delivery.

Material and Methods

Research Hypotheses

There is likely to be a relationship between body image dissatisfaction, emotional regulation (cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression), and marital satisfaction in females after cesarean delivery.

There is likely to be a predictive role of body image dissatisfaction and emotional regulation (cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression) on marital satisfaction in females after cesarean delivery.

Emotional regulation (cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression) will moderate the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and marital satisfaction in females after cesarean delivery.

Research Design

Quantitative research methodology and a correlational research design were used in the current study.

Sample

A sample of 120 females with cesarean deliveries was selected for the research.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was employed to acquire data and collect the sample.

Inclusion Criteria

Females with cesarean births were included in the study.

Participants aged 23–53 took part in the study.

Participants were selected after three months of their caesarian delivery.

Exclusion Criteria

Females with psychological problems were excluded.

Females with physical disabilities were not included.

Assessment Measures

The demographic sheet included age, education, occupation, type of family, marital duration, and family income. Body Dissatisfaction Scale was used to measure body image dissatisfaction (Tariq & Ijaz, 2014), Couples Satisfaction Index was used to measure marital satisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007), and Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003) was used to measure emotional regulation

Ethical Considerations

The authors of each questionnaire were contacted in advance to obtain permission to use it. The Institute of Lahore School of Behavioral Sciences at the University of Lahore will issue an authorization letter properly signed by the director for data collection. The heads of the relevant institutes will be asked for their approval before any data is collected. The interested participants' informed consent will be obtained. Data confidentiality and participant anonymity

will both be ensured. The right to withdraw from the study at any stage during research is given to participants.

Results

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variables	f (%)	M (SD)
Age		
Early Adulthood (23-30)	28(23.3)	
Middle Adulthood (30-50)	86(71.7)	
Later Adulthood (51-60)	6(5.0)	
Education		
Matric	20(16.7)	
Intermediate	16(13.3)	
Bachelors	35(29.2)	
MS/M.Phil	49(40.8)	
Occupation		
Homemaker	60(50.0)	
Teacher	60(50.0)	
Type of Family		
Joint	46(38.3)	
Nuclear	74(61.7)	
Marital Duration		14.52(6.91)
Family Income		346016(703552)

Note. N=120; M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; f=Frequency; %=Percentage;

Table 2

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient between Body Image Dissatisfaction, Emotion Regulation, and Marital Satisfaction among Women with Cesarean Delivery

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Body Image Dissatisfaction	62.40	14.45	-			
2. ER-Cognitive Reappraisal	23.04	7.05	-.27**	-		
3. ER-Expressive Suppression	14.50	4.50	.12	.04	-	
4. Marital Satisfaction	45.44	13.30	-.53**	.47**	-.26**	-

Note. N=120; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; ER=Emotion Regulation

The above table showed body image dissatisfaction has a significant negative relationship with marital satisfaction ($r = -.53^{**}$) and negative relationship with cognitive reappraisal ($r = -.27^{**}$) and no relationship with expressive suppression. Cognitive reappraisal has a significant positive relationship with marital satisfaction ($r = .47^{**}$) and expressive suppression has a significant negative relationship with marital satisfaction ($r = -.26$).

Table 3
Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Body Image Dissatisfaction, Cognitive Reappraisal, Expressive Suppression and Marital Satisfaction

Predictors	β	SE B	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Constant	61.46	6.24	10.01	.000	50.10	74.81
Body Image Dissatisfaction	-.37	.06	-5.67	.000	-.50	-.24
ER-Cognitive Reappraisal	.69	.13	5.10	.000	.42	.95
ER-Expressive Suppression	-.65	.20	-3.16	.002	-1.05	-.24

Note. *** $p < .001$, CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* =upper limit; ER= Emotional Regulation

The above table shows three predictors, body image dissatisfaction, cognitive reappraisal, and expressive suppression and one outcome variable, marital satisfaction. Body image dissatisfaction significantly predicted marital satisfaction ($\beta = -.37$) cognitive reappraisal significantly predict marital satisfaction ($\beta = .69$) expressive Suppression significantly predict marital satisfaction ($\beta = -.65$)

Table 4
Regression Analysis for Moderation of Cognitive Reappraisal between Body Image Dissatisfaction and Marital Satisfaction in Women with Cesarean Delivery

Variable	β	P	R ²	ΔR^2
Model-I			.29	
Body Image Dissatisfaction	-.53	.000		
Model-II			.40	.11
Cognitive Reappraisal	.35	.000		
Model-III			.40	.000
Body Image Dissatisfaction X Cognitive Reappraisal	-.09	.772		

Not. $N = 120$; * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$

The above table shows the moderation of cognitive reappraisal between body image dissatisfaction and marital satisfaction in women with cesarean delivery. In model 1, Body Image Dissatisfaction explained 29% variance in marital satisfaction with $F(1, 118) = 47.20$, $p < .000$. The findings revealed that body image dissatisfaction negatively predicted marital satisfaction in women with cesarean delivery. In model II, the Cognitive Reappraisal explained a 40% variance in marital satisfaction in women with cesarean delivery with $F(2, 117) = 27.87$, $p < .000$. The findings revealed that cognitive reappraisal positively predicted marital satisfaction in women with cesarean delivery. Model III showed a non-significant moderating effect of cognitive appraisal on marital satisfaction.

Table 5
Regression Analysis for Moderation of Expressive Suppression between Body Image Dissatisfaction and Marital Satisfaction in Women with Cesarean Delivery

Variable	β	P	R^2	ΔR^2
Model-I			.29	
Body Image Dissatisfaction	-.53	.000		
Model-II			.32	.04
Expressive Suppression	-.19	.013		
Model-III			.33	.01
Body Image Dissatisfaction X Expressive Suppression	.01	.330		

Note $N = 120$; * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

The above table showed a moderation of expressive suppression between body image dissatisfaction and marital satisfaction in women with cesarean delivery. In model 1, Body Image Dissatisfaction explained 29% variance in marital satisfaction with $F(1, 118) = 47.20$, $p < .000$. The findings revealed that body image dissatisfaction negatively predicted marital satisfaction in women with cesarean delivery. In model II, the Expressive Suppression explained a 32% variance in marital satisfaction in women with cesarean delivery with $F(2, 117) = 27.87$, $p < .000$. The findings revealed that expressive suppression positively predicted marital satisfaction in women with cesarean delivery. Model III showed a non-significant moderating role of expressive suppression on marital satisfaction.

Discussion

This research was conducted to assess the relationship between body image dissatisfaction, emotional regulation, and marital satisfaction in women after cesarean delivery. Body image is a perception of bodies on a visual, mental, emotional, and bodily level. Body perception and experience combine to form body image, a complicated and varied aspect of one's own identity. According to contemporary media and sociocultural norms, being thin makes one more desirable and can bring about positive social outcomes like approval and contentment (Twamley & Davis, 1999). Initially, it was hypothesized that there was likely to be a relationship between body image dissatisfaction, emotion regulation (cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression), and marital satisfaction in females with cesarean delivery. The findings of the study indicated that body image dissatisfaction has a significant negative relationship with marital satisfaction. Weight issues and the significance of body image have become more prevalent in recent years.

Over the last few decades, both genders have emphasized body image, but adult females are at a higher risk due to weight issues and the importance of body image (Blond, 2008). Primarily, it was the print media that inspired women of that era to compare themselves with celebrities and fashion icons. Then electronic media, from which evolved social media, heightened the desire for the slimness of the body, fair and flawless skin, etc. Childbirth has a physical and emotional toll on a woman's body, especially after cesarean delivery. Weight gain and surgical scars, which are permanent, make women wonder if their bodies are appealing to their partners. After giving birth, postpartum mothers are under pressure from society to go back into their pre-pregnancy bodies, which they regard as an awful concept. Intimacy normally takes a break due to the couple's new role as parents.

Relationships between spouses are significantly influenced by physical appearance, ideal body shape, and weight. Beauty is a crucial quality and ability to attract others, select a spouse for marriage, and loving relationships. When a partner is not satisfied with the appearance, it can cause low levels of satisfaction in romantic relationships. In most cases, people gain weight

and change physically after getting married, but the value they place on physical attractiveness remains constant. As a result, over time, partners begin to feel dissatisfied with both their bodies and those of their partners, which can result in marital dissatisfaction. The results of the current study also showed a strong inverse association between body image dissatisfaction and cognitive reappraisal. The outcomes of the study are supported by Webster and Tiggemann (2003) and Thompson et al. (1998) who reflected lower levels of body image were associated with cognitive reappraisal, changing standards about appearance, or accepting aging-related physical changes. A lower level of emotional expressiveness is substantially correlated with increased body dissatisfaction (Hayaki et al., 2012).

The second hypothesis was that body image dissatisfaction and emotion regulation (cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression) have a predicting role on marital satisfaction in females after cesarean delivery. The findings revealed that body image dissatisfaction negatively predicted marital satisfaction in females after cesarean delivery, whereas cognitive reappraisal positively predicted marital satisfaction in females with cesarean delivery. Expressive suppression negatively predicted marital satisfaction. The research findings are supported by the study of Campbell et al. (2005) and Laurenceau et al. (2005).

Contrary to emotional suppression, cognitive reappraisal results in affective advantages, as measured by both self- and peer-reported data, with more internally felt and externally expressed good feelings and less internally felt and externally stated negative emotions. The psychological advantages of cognitive reappraisal are linked to quality-of-life effects because more frequent cognitive reappraisal is directly related to higher levels of happiness in life, self-worth, positive thinking, and proficiency with the environment. Therefore, those who practice cognitive reappraisal more often may feel more confident in dealing with their emotions, and as a result, they feel more confident and are more in control of their lives.

The present study stated that expressive suppression negatively predicted marital satisfaction. Expressive suppression is the suppression of external emotional expression, such as putting on a fake smile while showing concern or keeping your face straight with no expression of emotion during happy moments. Emotional suppression can inhibit intimacy between couples and reduce contentment with dependable partners. As a result, over time, those partners gradually became less supportive in terms of relationship satisfaction. Even though expressive suppression may help people to have consistently favourable perceptions about uncooperative spouses. It may additionally decrease affection and make it harder for those partners to realize when their partner needs support and love from them, which can eventually cause such couples to become less caring. Butler et al. (2011) found that repressing emotional responses can make it difficult for partners to understand a person's needs and, as a result, restrict them from offering support.

The third hypothesis was that emotion regulation (cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression) would likely moderate the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and marital satisfaction in females after cesarean delivery. The findings of the study were non-significant showing that cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression did not play a significant role as moderators between body image dissatisfaction and marital satisfaction in females after cesarean delivery. Emotional regulation strategies like cognitive reappraisal may not moderate the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and marital satisfaction in women with cesarean delivery because body image concerns are often deeply rooted and tied to persistent physical changes. Cognitive reappraisal involves changing the way one thinks about a situation to alter its emotional impact. However, when body image dissatisfaction stems from visible and lasting changes in the body post-cesarean delivery, simply reframing one's thoughts may not be sufficient. The negative self-perception associated with body image dissatisfaction can be pervasive and resistant to change, making

it difficult for cognitive reappraisal to significantly improve marital satisfaction. Additionally, societal and cultural pressures regarding body image can reinforce these negative perceptions, further limiting the effectiveness of cognitive reappraisal.

Expressive suppression, on the other hand, involves inhibiting the outward expression of emotions. While this strategy might help in maintaining a temporary sense of calm or avoiding conflict, it does not address the underlying issues of body image dissatisfaction. Suppressing emotions can lead to increased internal stress and a sense of disconnection or reduced emotional intimacy in a relationship. Over time, this can exacerbate feelings of dissatisfaction and strain within the marriage. Moreover, the lack of open communication about one's body image concerns can prevent the couple from addressing and resolving these issues together, thereby failing to improve marital satisfaction. The complex dynamics of marital relationships, which involve communication, mutual support, and shared experiences, are not adequately addressed by expressive suppression, limiting its ability to moderate the impact of body image dissatisfaction on marital satisfaction.

Conclusion

In short, the findings of the study revealed that emotional regulation strategies like cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression may not moderate the relationship between body image dissatisfaction and marital satisfaction in women with cesarean delivery because body image dissatisfaction is often deeply ingrained and linked to persistent physical changes that are resistant to cognitive reappraisal. Furthermore, expressive suppression can increase stress and reduce emotional intimacy, exacerbating marital issues rather than alleviating them. Additionally, marital satisfaction is influenced by various factors beyond individual emotional regulation, such as communication, support, and relationship dynamics, which these strategies alone may not effectively address.

Limitations

Due to the study's reliance on self-reported data, participants may give answers that are socially acceptable or may not correctly describe their feelings and experiences, which could bias the findings. Besides, a small sample might restrict the generalizability of findings.

Implications

The results of the study can be used to educate therapists and medical professionals about the significance of treating body image issues and emotional control in postpartum care for women who have had cesarean deliveries. Public health campaigns can also increase understanding of these problems and encourage the use of available options for the assistance of mothers.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

There was no conflict of interest in the study.

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