

Marriage Proposal, Body Image Concern, Gamophobia and Life Satisfaction in University Students

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Abstract

This study explored the relationship between marriage proposal rejection, gamophobia, body image concerns, and life satisfaction among female university students in Pakistan. A total of 300 unmarried students aged 18 to 30 were selected through non-probability sampling and completed standardized measures including the Marriage Proposal Rejection Reaction Scale, Body Shape Questionnaire, Gamophobia Scale, and Satisfaction with Life Scale. Findings showed that stronger emotional reactions to marriage proposal rejection were linked with higher gamophobia and body image dissatisfaction as well as lower life satisfaction. Gamophobia was positively related to body image concerns and negatively related to life satisfaction whereas body image concerns alone did not significantly predict life satisfaction. Age differences appeared only in body image concerns with student's aged 22–26 reporting greater dissatisfaction. Overall, the results suggest that rejection experiences, fear of commitment, and negative body perceptions can lower young women's satisfaction with life, highlighting the importance of addressing these issues in psychological and cultural contexts.

Keywords: Marriage Proposal Rejection, Gamophobia, Body Image Concerns, Life Satisfaction, Female Students.

Introduction

University life is a turning point in young adulthood, bringing with it academic, personal, and social changes. These shifts often shape how students see themselves, regulate emotions, and evaluate their overall life satisfaction (Arnett, 2000). During this stage both self-image and romantic relationships play a central role in psychological adjustment.

Romantic relationships are important for identity development, emotional growth, and overall well-being (Nganga & Wasanga, 2010). Challenges such as rejection, unreciprocated love, body image concerns, or fear of commitment can interfere with healthy relationship building and lower life satisfaction (Leary, 2015). In Islamic societies marriage is not only a personal milestone but also a cultural and religious obligation, carrying deep social expectations (Ahmad, 2023). However, for many young adults navigating these pressures can be difficult often contributing to psychological stress.

Cultural traditions also shape how marriage proposals are experienced. In Western societies proposals are often celebrated as personal or romantic gestures while in Islamic traditions they usually involve family approval and formal participation (Ponzetti, 2005; Schweingruber et al., 2008). Regardless of cultural setting rejection can have lasting emotional effects often lowering self-esteem and influencing future relationship choices. Rejection is commonly described as the feeling of being unwanted or undervalued by others (Rohner, 2004). Over time these experiences may trigger anxieties about intimacy or marriage sometimes leading to gamophobia the fear of marriage or commitment (Reis et al., 2000; Al-Jundi, 2017).

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Another key factor linked to young adults' well-being is body image. Body image reflects the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions people hold about their bodies (Cash, 2011 & Grogan, 2008). Negative body image has been strongly associated with low self-esteem, disordered eating, depression, and reduced life satisfaction (Smink et al., & Dehghani et al., 2012). In collectivist societies like Pakistan, cultural standards of beauty and social pressure to "look a certain way" make these concerns particularly common among young women (Ameer & Karamat, 2002 ; Moeen et al., 2013).

Gamophobia, or the irrational fear of marriage and commitment, can further affect mental health and relationships (Jabr & Hassan, 2022). This fear often stems from personal insecurities, family conflicts, or past rejection, and it prevents individuals from forming long-term, meaningful connections. As a result, gamophobia may reduce life satisfaction, which reflects an individual's overall evaluation of life quality (Diener et al., 1999). Life satisfaction is closely tied to mental health, happiness, and the ability to adapt socially (Pavot & Diener, 1993; Suldo et al., 2006).

Overall, marriage proposal rejection, body image concerns, gamophobia, and life satisfaction are interconnected challenges that shape young adults' experiences (Arshad & Akhtar, 2024). These issues are especially relevant in Pakistan, where cultural expectations around marriage and appearance remain particularly strong. This study therefore explores how marriage proposal rejection and body image concerns predict gamophobia and life satisfaction among female university students.

This study explores how marriage proposal rejection, body image concerns, and gamophobia relate to life satisfaction among female university students. It further examines the predictive role of rejection in gamophobia, the impact of body image on life satisfaction, and age-related differences across these variables.

Methodology

The methodology section outlines the research design, participants, measures, and procedures used to explore how marriage proposal rejection, gamophobia, body image concerns, and life satisfaction are related among female university students. A clear and structured approach was followed to ensure the study's findings were both reliable and valid.

Research Design

A correlational research design was selected as the study aimed to examine the links between marriage proposal rejection, body image concerns, gamophobia, and life satisfaction among female university students without manipulating variables. This approach made it possible to observe natural relationships and predictive patterns including how rejection contributes to gamophobia how body image affects life satisfaction and how age differences play a role. Convenience sampling was chosen for feasibility as it provided easy access to students from selected universities within the available time and resources. This approach made it possible to include participants who were relevant and readily available ensuring sufficient data were collected on these sensitive psychological issues.

Participants

The study sample consisted of 300 female university students, aged 18 to 27 years, from public and private universities in Sialkot, and Gujranwala. Participants were enrolled in both undergraduate and postgraduate programs.

Measures

Marriage Proposal Rejection Perception Scale ((Zaib-un-Nisa & Sara Subhan)

The Marriage proposal rejection reaction scale was a 21-item scale assesses perceptions of marriage proposal rejection in interpersonal and social contexts. Responses are rated on a 5-

point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stronger feelings of rejection. In the present study Cronbach's alpha was .88, showing good reliability.

Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ-34; Cooper et al., 1987)

The BSQ-34 consists of 34 items designed to measure concerns about body shape and dissatisfaction. Items are scored on a 6-point Likert scale with higher scores reflecting greater body image concerns. In this study the scale showed excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .91.

Gamophobia Scale (Qaqah et al., 2023)

The Gamophobia scale was a 22-item scale measures fear of commitment and avoidance of long-term romantic relationships. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency in the current study with a Cronbach's alpha of .86.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985)

The SWLS includes 5 items that assess global life satisfaction, rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Higher scores represent greater life satisfaction. In this study the Cronbach's alpha was .84 indicating satisfactory reliability.

Procedure

The study was conducted after securing permission from university authorities. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, assured of confidentiality, and asked to provide informed consent. Questionnaires were distributed in classroom settings and took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. Students were encouraged to respond honestly and reminded that participation was voluntary. After data collection, responses were coded and analyzed using SPSS.

Result

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	M	SD	α
Marriage Proposal Rejection	51.14	9.27	.77
Body Image Concerns (BSQ-34)	71.67	25.77	.91
Gamophobia	58.43	12.56	.92
Life Satisfaction	19.82	6.21	.71

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation and α = Cronbach's alpha.

The scales demonstrated acceptable to excellent reliability: Marriage Proposal Rejection (α = .77), Satisfaction with Life (α = .71), Gamophobia (α = .92), and Body Shaming (α = .91). Mean scores and standard deviations are presented in the table 1.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Inter-correlations among Study Variables (N = 300)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. MPRRS	67.92	12.90	—			
2. SWLS	22.83	6.13	-.16**	—		
3. GS	57.44	20.20	.15**	-.17**	—	
4. BSQ	71.67	25.78	.28**	-.04	.21**	—

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01.

Pearson correlation analysis showed that stronger reactions to marriage proposal rejection were significantly associated with higher gamophobia ($r = .15$, $p < .01$), greater body image concerns ($r = .28$, $p < .01$), and lower life satisfaction ($r = -.16$, $p < .05$). Gamophobia was positively correlated with body image concerns ($r = .21$, $p < .01$) and negatively correlated with life satisfaction ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$). Body image concerns were not significantly related to life satisfaction (Table 2).

Table 3: Regression Analyses predicting Gamophobia and Life Satisfaction

Predictor	Outcome	β	t	p
Marriage Proposal Rejection	Gamophobia	.15	2.72	.007
BIC	Life Satisfaction	-.04	-0.75	.455

Note: BIC= Body image concern, β = standardized beta

Dependent Variable: Life Satisfaction (SWLS).

Regression analysis further revealed that marriage proposal rejection significantly predicted gamophobia ($\beta = .15$, $p = .007$). However, body image concerns did not significantly predict life satisfaction ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .455$) (Table 3).

Table 4: Regression analysis

Variable	Age Group	M	SD	F(2, 297)	p	η^2
MPRR	18–22	66.68	12.61	2.13	.121	.014
	22–26	69.92	12.94	---	---	---
	26–30	69.10	14.51	---	---	---
LS	18–22	23.13	6.12	0.49	.614	.003
	22–26	22.49	6.34	---	---	---
	26–30	22.15	5.69	---	---	---
G	18–22	58.69	20.40	1.15	.318	.008
	22–26	56.23	19.75	---	---	---
	26–30	52.40	20.63	---	---	---
BIC	18–22	68.96	25.77	3.13	.045	.021
	22–26	76.89	25.67	---	---	---
	26–30	70.05	23.43	---	---	---

Note: MPRR= marriage proposal rejection reaction; LS= life satisfaction; G= gamophobia; BIC= body image concern; η^2 = effect size.

A series of one-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine age-related differences in marriage proposal rejection, life satisfaction, gamophobia, and body image concern among female university students. Results indicated no significant age effects for marriage proposal rejection, $F(2, 297) = 2.13$, $p = .121$, $\eta^2 = .014$, life satisfaction, $F(2, 297) = 0.49$, $p = .614$, $\eta^2 = .003$, or gamophobia, $F(2, 297) = 1.15$, $p = .318$, $\eta^2 = .008$. In contrast, body image concern differed significantly across groups, $F(2, 297) = 3.13$, $p = .045$, $\eta^2 = .021$, with students aged 22–26 years ($M = 76.89$, $SD = 25.67$) reporting higher concerns than those aged 18–22 years ($M = 68.96$, $SD = 25.77$). No other significant differences were observed. These findings suggest that age influences body image concerns but not marriage proposal rejection, life satisfaction, or gamophobia, thereby providing partial support for the hypothesis.

Discussion

This study examined the links between marriage proposal rejection, gamophobia, body image concern, and life satisfaction among female university students. The results showed that rejection was associated with greater fear of commitment, more body image concerns, and lower life satisfaction. These findings are in line with past studies showing that rejection experiences increase sensitivity and emotional difficulties in relationships (Downey et al., 1998; Blackhart et al., 2009).

Gamophobia was also positively related to body image concerns and negatively to life satisfaction (Nasir & Akhtar, 2025) which supports previous research suggesting that fear of commitment is often linked with insecurity and lower self-esteem (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). However, body image concern did not significantly predict life satisfaction, which contrasts with earlier findings that body dissatisfaction usually lowers well-being (Swami et al., 2010). This may be because cultural and family values provide a support against its negative effects (Maes et al., 2012).

Regression analysis further confirmed that marriage proposal rejection significantly predicted gamophobia, consistent with studies linking rejection sensitivity to intimacy fears and avoidance of close relationships (Downey et al., 1998; Romero-Canyas et al., 2010). In contrast, body image concern showed limited predictive value for life satisfaction in this context.

ANOVA results indicated age differences only in body image concern, with students aged 22–26 reporting higher concerns compared to other groups. This supports earlier research showing that social pressures and beauty standards strongly affect body satisfaction in young adulthood (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001; Ata et al., 2007). No significant age differences were observed for marriage proposal rejection, gamophobia, or life satisfaction.

Overall, these findings suggest that rejection experiences play a central role in shaping fears of commitment and negative self-perceptions, while body image concerns do not always reduce life satisfaction. Future research should explore how cultural norms, family support, and resilience factors may moderate these relationships (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Arnett, 2015).

Conclusion

The study found that marriage proposal rejection was linked to higher fear of commitment, greater body dissatisfaction, and lower life satisfaction. Gamophobia was also tied to negative body image and reduced well-being. Age differences were only observed in body image, with students aged 22–26 reporting more dissatisfaction. These findings highlight the need to explore a more diverse sample across regions and genders for a clearer understanding. Collecting data during less stressful academic periods and using mixed or longitudinal methods could provide deeper insights into the causes and long-term effects of rejection and commitment fears. Overall, the results point to the importance of helping young women build resilience, develop a healthier body image, and access better mental health support.

Recommendations

- Future studies should include diverse samples across regions and genders.
- Data should be collected in less stressful periods.
- Researchers should use mixed and longitudinal methods to gain deeper and causal insights.

Implications

- The study showed the impact of rejection, body image, and gamophobia on well-being.
- It supported the need for counseling, awareness, and university-based interventions.
- It provided groundwork for future cross-cultural studies.

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