

**Examining the Relationship between Gaslighting and Psychological Distress among Married People: Mediating Role of Marital Satisfaction**Maryam, N, Shakir<sup>a</sup>, Nasreen, Rafique<sup>a</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Clinical Psychology, Shifa Tameer-e-Millat University Islamabad, Pakistan**Abstract**

Gaslighting is a type of psychological manipulation that intends to create doubt in the targeted individual in such a way that it causes him/her to doubt his/her own reality, perception and memory. Gaslighting is an understudied form of abuse within context of intimate relationship in Pakistan. The main objective of the present study was to examine the relationship between gaslighting and psychological distress among married people along with mediating role of marital satisfaction. Additionally, gender differences in gaslighting were also investigated. A sample of 300 married people from cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad (Pakistan) was selected by using convenience sampling technique. Three instruments translated into Urdu language were used to measure study variables which were; DASS-21, Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale. Results revealed that Gaslighting was positively related with psychological distress and negatively related with marital satisfaction among married people that supported the hypotheses of the study. Additionally, marital satisfaction was found to be negatively related with psychological distress. Mediation analysis indicated that marital satisfaction mediated the relationship between gaslighting and psychological distress; gaslighting decreased the marital satisfaction which in turn increased psychological distress. Moreover, results indicated that married women experienced more gaslighting as compared to married men. The findings of the study can be helpful in understanding and developing awareness regarding gaslighting and its impact on people's psychological health and help mental health professional to develop therapeutic interventions to address psychological problems caused by gaslighting.

**Keywords:** Gaslighting, Manipulation, Psychological Distress, Intimate Partner Violence, Marital Satisfaction.**Correspondence:** Ms. Maryam, N, Shaki (Master Scholar)

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## 1. Introduction

A significant amount of research has been devoted to adult's psychological and emotional abuse, mainly on women (Follingstad, 2011; Rogers & Follingstad, 2014). One of the specific form of abuse that has gained attention in recent research is gaslighting (Rogers & Follingstad, 2014; Aqeel, Rohail, & Saif, 2021). In today's time, the term of gaslighting is applied to diverse contexts ranging from media to workplace (Durvasula, 2021), medical and mental health fields (Tormoen, 2019). Specifically, the word of Gaslighting is widely applied to intimate relationships (Abramson, 2014; Graves & Samp, 2021; Stern, 2008). Gaslighting in marital relationship tends to have negative effects on psychological health of victim and cause mental health issues (Pico, 2005). It has been found that there was strong association between depression and low level of marital satisfaction and increased risk of psychological violence in intimate relationships (Barros- Gomes et al, 2019).

Gaslighting refers to a particular form of emotional and mental abuse that encompasses number of manipulations that are utilized in order to intentionally sabotage psychological strength of a person (Welch, 2008). Within context of psychology, the phenomenon of gaslighting is referred as a manipulation that intends to create doubt in the targeted individual that leads to question their own reality, perception and memory (Dorpat, 1994; Petric, 2018). Gaslighting is a type of abuse that is mentioned as an intimate partner violence in the literature (Stark, 2012). Literature revealed that victimization of gaslighting was related with decreased sense of self and loss of trust on others. (Klein et al., 2022).

Gaslighting has negative effect on victim's physical and psychological health. A strong relationship has been found between violence in intimate relationship and its adverse effects on psychological health of victim (Pico, 2005). The most prominent consequences of gaslighting on psychological health of victim were depression (Constantino et al., 2000), anxiety (Hathaway et al., 2000) and post-traumatic stress disorder (Woods, 2000).

Psychological distress is referred as a condition that is characterized by emotional kind of problems and includes anxiety symptoms (i.e., restlessness, tension) and depression (i.e., loss of interest and pleasure). It also encompasses somatic symptoms such as insomnia, fatigue, headache etc that tend to vary across cultures (Horwitz, 2002).

A research was conducted in Urban Karachi (Pakistan) which showed that married women who were exposed to intimate partner violence has low level of psychological well-being as compared to women who hadn't experienced intimate partner violence (Ali et al., 2011). Literature suggests that high level of violence within intimate relationship among married women lead to low level of psychological well-being, mental health, life satisfaction, helpful emotions and high level of psychological distress, anxiety, depression and emotional dysregulation as compared to non-abused women (Hussain et al., 2020).

Marriage and its relationship with psychological distress is well established (Li et al., 2016). A study revealed that marriage was significantly related to depression (Whisman, 2001). Marital satisfaction is defined as an individual's own evaluation regarding his/her marital relationship on subjective basis (Taylor et al., 1997). Literature suggests that depression was negatively associated with marital satisfaction (Proulx et al., 2007; Whisman & Uebelacker, 2009).

Gaslighting may have negative effect on marital satisfaction. Earlier study conducted on Palestinian married women revealed that abused wives had high level of negative communication patterns with their husbands and low level of marital satisfaction, low commitment to marriage, warmth, agreement and contentment in comparison to non-abused women (Haj-Yahia, 2002).

Gaslighting is a type of psychological abuse and emotional manipulation. It is predominant among women who are living in patriarchal societies such as Pakistan where men dominate over women in every aspect of their lives that cause physical, emotional and psychological abuse that further leads to psychological distress and other physical and mental health issues among women. However, there is limited research on gaslighting that affects men psychological health. (Ali et al., 1999; Hayes and Jeffries, 2015; Lachkar, 2001).

Married women in Pakistan are frequently exposed to oppressive behaviours by their partners. Domestic violence experienced by women tends to have negative effect on their psychological well-being, life satisfaction, self-esteem and positive orientation towards life that leads to depression (Hassan & Malik, 2012).

The current study aims to investigate the relationship between gaslighting and psychological distress in men and women who are married. Although gaslighting can occur in multiple contexts, the proposed study emphasizes on gaslighting in romantic relationships because mostly people in romantic relationships experiences gaslighting that affects their psychological health and marital satisfaction. Poor marital satisfaction leads to psychological distress that can be considered as vital source of chronic stress (Whisman & Baucom, 2012). On the other hand, psychological distress can also lead to poor adjustment in marital relationship due to disturbance in one's family life, daily life activities at home, lack of social activities (Benazon & Coyne, 2000).

Although limited quantitative research has been conducted on gaslighting. The proposed study aims to conduct quantitative research for investigating the phenomenon of gaslighting and its correlates. Additionally, mediating role of marital satisfaction has been studied to explain how gaslighting and psychological distress are related to each other in the presence of marital satisfaction. Demographic characteristics such as age, gender, monthly income, educational level and family system has also been considered that can be related to gaslighting.

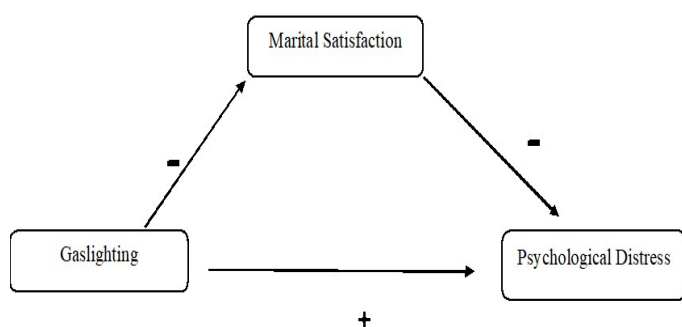
Previous researches emphasized on prevalence of women's victimization within intimate relationships (Archer, 2000; Bates et al., 2014). Limited research has been conducted for purpose of investigating on effects of gaslighting on men. The current study aims to investigate the gender differences in terms of experiences of gaslighting and its subsequent effect on their marital satisfaction and psychological health.

This study will be helpful to understand the effect of gaslighting experienced by men and women on their marital satisfaction and psychological health that deteriorates their autonomy, self-confidence, self-esteem and overall health who are in intimate relationship with each other. (Hassan & Malik, 2012). The results of the current study will be beneficial for understanding and providing help to those married people who have experienced gaslighting and helping mental health care providers to develop strategies for managing psychological problems of victims.

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between Gaslighting and Psychological Distress among married people. The study also examined the mediating role of marital satisfaction between Gaslighting and psychological distress among married people and gender difference in experience of gaslighting was also investigated. The hypotheses of present study were; H1: Gaslighting is positively related with psychological distress among married people. H2: Gaslighting is negatively related with marital satisfaction among married people. H3: Marital satisfaction is negatively related with psychological distress among married people. H4: Marital satisfaction negatively mediates the relationship between gaslighting and psychological distress among married people. H5: Married women will have more gaslighting experience than married men.

Figure: 1

*Conceptual Framework of Relationship between Gaslighting and Psychological Distress and Mediating Role of Marital Satisfaction*



## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research Design

The current study is a quantitative study by employing a questionnaire based survey design. The research carried out on 300 married people including men and women (M= 150, F= 150) with age range 18 to 55 years (Mean= 1.5, Standard Deviation=.50). Data was collected from different areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad employing convenience sampling technique. The scales used in the study were (1) Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (2) Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) (3) (Evaluating & Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication, Happiness ENRICH marital satisfaction scale. Results were analysed with multiple hierarchical regression and independent sample t-test by using SPSS.

### 2.2 Sample

In this study, a sample of 300 married people (M=150, F= 150) participated. They were selected through convenience sampling technique. Data was collected from different areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad having age range of 18 to 55 years (M=36.86, S. D= 7.00). Married people having varying educational level and monthly income were included in this study. People belonging to joint and nuclear family system were also included. Unmarried, widowed, divorced women and single men were not included. Those participants whose ages are above 55 years and less than 18 years were not selected.

### 2.3 Instruments

Following instruments were used for measuring the constructs involved in this study.

**2.3.1 Demographic Sheets:** For the present study, a demographic sheet was designed to collect information related to gender, age, marital status, education level, monthly income and family system of participants

**2.3.2 The Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire:** The participant's experiences of gaslighting were measured by using the Urdu version of Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire. The Victim Gaslighting questionnaire was originally developed by (Bhatti et al., 2021) to measure beliefs, behaviors and feelings of victim of gaslighting. It consists of 14 items that assess two dimensions of gaslighting (a) Peer disagreement (9 items) (b) loss of self-trust (4 items). The item examples include, "You constantly change your words or thoughts before speaking" (Item no.1), "You apologize without knowing what you did wrong" (Item no. 4). Each item is rated on 5 point Likert scale with values ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and total possible range between 14 and 70. Higher scores indicate high level of gaslighting. This scale consists of two subscales that are peer disagreement and loss of self-trust and it has no reverse items. It has high alpha reliability of 0.93 for total scale with 0.92 for peer disagreement subscale and 0.85 for the loss of self-trust subscale (Bhatti et al., 2021).

Translation of Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire originally developed by Mahnoor Bhatti and colleagues was done in the present study. This scale was translated into Urdu Language as Pakistani people generally better understands it after obtaining permission from the author. The translated version of victim gaslighting questionnaire had alpha reliability of 0.86. The Alpha coefficients of its subscale peer disagreement is ( $\alpha=0.82$ ) and loss of self-trust is ( $\alpha=0.69$ ). Test-retest reliability of original English version and Urdu version is ( $\alpha=0.99$ ).

**2.3.3 Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS).** DASS is 21 item self-report inventory for assessing severity level of depression, anxiety and stress considering last 7 days. An Urdu version of DASS-21 have been developed by Aslam & Kamal (2018) which was used in the current study. Each item is rated on a 4 point Likert scale ranging from 0 ("Never") to 3 ("Almost Always") and scores are calculated separately for each subscale. The scale has no reverse items and it has total possible score range from 0-21 for each subscale. The alpha coefficient for the scale has been reported ( $\alpha=0.93$ ) and for subscales of depression ( $\alpha= 0.84$ ), anxiety ( $\alpha= 0.86$ ) and stress ( $\alpha=0.83$ ) respectively by the original authors (Aslam & Kamal, 2018). In the current study, alpha coefficient for the overall scale has been reported ( $\alpha=0.89$ ) and subscales of depression ( $\alpha= 0.79$ ), anxiety ( $\alpha= 0.76$ ) and stress ( $\alpha=0.73$ ) respectively.

**2.3.4 ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale):** Olson and colleagues developed a self-report inventory for measuring multiple aspects of marital satisfaction in 1983. A shortened version of it has been developed in 1993 which consists of 15 items. Urdu version of this scale was used in the present study which was translated by Anjum et al., 2022 after obtaining permission from the author. The scale consists of 15 items which are rated on 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 ("Completely Disagree") to (Completely Agree"). Six items of the scale have reverse scoring that are (item no 2,5,8,9,12,14). On the scale, high scores indicate high level of marital satisfaction. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of overall scale has been reported ( $\alpha=.92$ ), for marital satisfaction subscale ( $\alpha=.90$ ) and for idealistic distortion subscale( $\alpha=.89$ ) respectively (Anjum et al., 2022). In the current study,

alpha coefficient of overall scale is ( $\alpha=.87$ ) and ( $\alpha=.80$ ) and ( $\alpha=.74$ ) for marital satisfaction and idealistic distortion subscales respectively.

#### 2.4 Procedure

Ethical approval was attained from the Ethical Review Board, Department of Clinical Psychology, Shifa Tameer e Millat University, Ethics Committee, along with head of the institutes. Translation of Victim Gaslighting Scale developed by Mahnoor Bhatti and colleagues (2021) was done after obtaining permission from the author. After that, the researcher collected the data from the participants on convenience basis from different areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Consent was taken from those who wanted to take part in the study by getting their signature on informed consent form on which purpose and objective of research was clearly explained.

Questionnaires were provided to married people who were willing to participate in the study. Participants were briefed about the objectives of the study and they were assured that their information will be kept confidential. Furthermore, information regarding right of withdrawal from the study was also provided to participants. Completed questionnaires were then collected by the researcher and

**Table 1**

*Correlation between Demographic Variables, Gaslighting, Psychological Distress and Marital Satisfaction Among Married People(N=300)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Psychological Distress	-	.23**	-.14	-.18**	-.11	.03	.57**	-.50**
Gender		-	-.37**	-.27**	.01	-.03	-.21**	-.18**
Age			-	.26**	.02	-.13	-.10*	-.01
Monthly Income				-	.35**	-.08	-.08	.10
Educational Level					-	-.02	-.08	.10
Family System						-	.07	.15*
Gaslighting							-	-.38**
Marital Satisfaction								-

Note. \* <0.05, \*\* p< 0.01.

**Table 2**

*Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for role of Demographic variables, Marital Satisfaction and gaslighting in causing Psychological Distress among married People (N=300).*

Model 1	B	T	P	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	F	P
<b>Constant</b>		4.259	.000	.080	-	5.09	.000
Gender	.18	2.926	.004				
Age	-.05	-.891	.374				
Monthly Income	-.09	-1.454	.147				
Educational Level	-.09	-.842	.400				
Family System	-.04	-.842	.400				
<b>Model 2</b>							
<b>Constant</b>		4.919	.000	.447	.37	33.66	.000
Gender	.03	.660	.51				
Age	-.06	-1.344	.18				
Monthly Income	-.08	-1.600	.11				
Educational Level	-.01	-.360	.71				
Family System	.03	.747	.45				
Gaslighting	.42	8.86	.000				
Marital Satisfaction	-.33	-6.90	.000				

Note; R<sup>2</sup>= R Square,  $\Delta R^2$ = Change in R Square,  $\beta$ = Standardized Beta coefficients

Table 2 represents the results of two models, in which predictor variables were demographics, gaslighting and marital satisfaction. In block 1, demographic variables didn't show any significant contribution in predicting psychological distress among married people [F (5, 294) = 5.09, p>.001]. Only gender appeared to be

respondents were thanked and debriefed about purpose of the questionnaire and research. Collected data was analysed through SPSS.

### 3. Result

Table 1 represents correlation between gaslighting, psychological distress and marital satisfaction to test the hypothesis 1,2,3. Findings revealed that gender is significantly and positively associated with psychological distress. Results showed that psychological distress has significant and negative relationship with age, monthly income and educational level. Family system reported non-significant result with psychological distress.

Moreover, it has been found that gaslighting is positively and significantly related to psychological distress. Gaslighting has negative and significant relationship with marital satisfaction as well as there is negative relationship between marital satisfaction and psychological distress. The analysis supports the stated hypotheses no.1, 2 and 3. These variables were further subjected to Multiple Hierarchical Regression analysis for testing the hypotheses.

significantly associated with the psychological distress among married people. In block 2, with the addition of Gaslighting and Marital Satisfaction, value of R<sup>2</sup> changed from .08 to .45 indicating an increase of 37% variance in psychological distress [F (7,292) = 33.66, p<.001]. Both Gaslighting, Marital Satisfaction and demographic variables added jointly 45% variance in the psychological distress.

Table 3

Mediating role of marital satisfaction in relationship between gaslighting and psychological distress (N=300)

Paths		B	SE	t	p	95%CI	
						LL	UL
Gaslighting	→ Marital Satisfaction	-.41	1.96	-7.22	.000	67.78	75.51
Marital Satisfaction	→ Psychological Distress	-.31	.044	-7.07	.000	-.40	-.22
Direct Effect		.43	.047	9.31	.000	.34	.52
Indirect Effect		.13	.026			.08	.18
Total Effect		.56	.047	12.10	.000	.47	.65

Note: B= Beta, SE= Standard Error, CI= Confidence Interval, LL= Lower limit, UL= Upper limit

Table 4

Mean differences of Gender in Gaslighting, Psychological Distress and Marital Satisfaction (N=300)

Variable	Married Males (n=150)		Married Females (n=150)		t	p	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Gaslighting	31.06	9.68	35.45	10.72	-3.723	.000	0.42
Psychological Distress	17.35	9.40	22.04	10.53	-4.070	.000	0.47
Marital Satisfaction	60.13	9.74	56.08	11.82	3.235	.001	0.37

Table 3 shows the mediation analysis to test the hypothesis 4 to explore the mediating role of marital satisfaction in relationship between gaslighting and psychological distress. The path from gaslighting to marital satisfaction shows a significant negative relationship ( $B = -.41$ ,  $t = -7.22$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), indicating that as gaslighting increases, marital satisfaction decreases. The path from marital satisfaction to psychological distress shows a significant negative relationship ( $B = -.31$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), indicating as marital satisfaction decreases, psychological distress increases. The indirect effect of gaslighting on psychological distress through marital satisfaction is significant ( $B = .13$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), indicating that effect of gaslighting on psychological distress is mediated by marital satisfaction. In indirect effect, marital satisfaction has mediated in a way that intensity of strong relationship between gaslighting and psychological distress has decreased from .43 to .13. The total effect of gaslighting on psychological distress, combining both direct and indirect effects, is significant ( $B = .56$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), indicating that gaslighting has an overall positive impact on psychological distress, primarily through its effect on marital satisfaction.

Table 4 represents the mean difference between married men and women in order to test the hypothesis 5 which states that married women will have more gaslighting experience than married men.

Results shows that there exists significant mean difference between married men ( $M = 31.6$ ,  $SD = 9.68$ ) and married women ( $M = 35.45$ ,  $SD = 10.72$ ),  $t(298) = -3.723$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = 0.42$  in gaslighting. Results indicates that married women were more gaslighted as compared to men due to difference in their mean scores. The t-value is -3.723 which is statistically significant indicates notable difference between gender. The value of Cohen's  $d$  ( $d = 0.42$ ) is less than .50 which indicates medium effect size between gender in terms of gaslighting which means difference in gaslighting between married men and women exists at medium level.

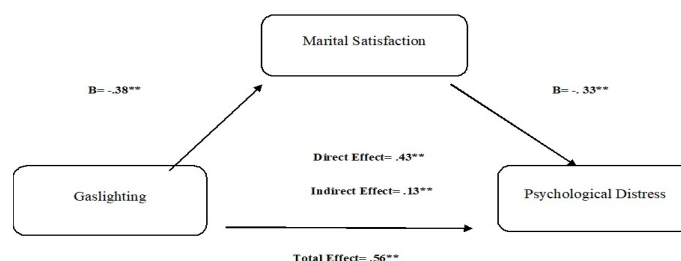
Figure 2  
Statistical Model of mediation of marital satisfaction in Relationship Between Gaslighting and Psychological Distress



Figure 2 shows the mediation analysis of marital satisfaction which indicates that marital satisfaction fully and significantly mediates the relationship between gaslighting and psychological distress. Direct effect between gaslighting and psychological distress was significant. Indirect effect of gaslighting on psychological distress through marital satisfaction was also significant. Overall relationship between gaslighting and psychological distress was also significant.

#### 4. Discussion

Gaslighting is a hidden kind of psychological abuse that affects victim's psychological health as they tend to doubt their own sense of reality. Gaslighting is prevalent across the world specifically in patriarchal societies such as Pakistan due to dominance of males over females in all life's aspects. Though some work has been done related to gaslighting on women in intimate relationships all over the world (Archer, 2000; Bates et al., 2014).

The present study intended to examine the association between gaslighting and psychological distress among married people. Moreover, it aimed to examine the impact of marital satisfaction as a mediator. A secondary purpose of the study was to investigate the gender difference in gaslighting. In addition, role of demographics variables consisting of age, educational level, socioeconomic status on gaslighting were also examined.

Total 300 married people within the age range of 18 to 55 years were included in the study. Participation of married males and females was almost equal in the study. Majority of participants had monthly income around 100000 (Pak. Rupees) representing the middle class of the country. Most of the participants belonged to joint family system with a percentage 75%.

To test the stated hypotheses, Pearson correlation, multiple hierarchical regression analysis, Mediation analysis and T-test were computed. Results of the regression analysis showed a negligible impact of demographic variables on the psychological distress except gender as women were found significantly more psychologically distressed as compared to males [ $F(5, 294) = 5.09, p > .001$ ]. After statistically controlling the role of demographic variables in the psychological distress of married people, the regression analysis further showed that gaslighting significantly and positively impacted the psychological distress of married people as the value of  $R^2$  changed from .08 to .45 indicating an increase of 37% variance in psychological distress [ $F(7, 292) = 33.66, p < .001$ ]. Both Gaslighting, Marital Satisfaction and demographic variables added jointly 45% variance in the psychological distress.

As hypothesized in hypothesis 1, Gaslighting is positively related with psychological distress among married men and women. Findings of the study supported the first hypothesis that gaslighting was significantly and positively related with psychological distress among married people. Results can be supported with the previous findings that there was positive correlation between intimate partner violence and psychological well-being of women that affected their self-esteem, life satisfaction and leads to depression (Hassan & Anila, 2012). The results are also consistent with earlier researches which showed that psychological abuse by spouse leads to negative impact on one's health and causes number of health problems (Yoshihama et al., 2009; Audi, Segall-Correa et al., 2012; Zakar, Zakar, M., 2012; Ball, 2013).

Moreover, previous researches revealed that psychological violence by spouse in intimate relationships leads to negative

consequences on mental health of victims and causes number of mental disorders i.e., depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, posttraumatic stress disorder (Golding, 1999). Literature suggests that intimate partner violence was related negatively with victim's psychological well-being (Hellemans et al., 2015; Mir, 2017).

As hypothesized in hypothesis 2, Gaslighting is negatively related with marital satisfaction among married people. The results of current study supported the second hypothesis that gaslighting was negatively related with marital satisfaction among married people. These results are consistent with earlier researches which revealed a significant as well as negative relationship exists between marital satisfaction and intimate partner violence (Stith et al., 2007; Azizi & Haji Alizadeh, 2023). One of earlier study concluded that early experiences of violence in marital relationship had significant negative effect on marital adjustment in married women (Hosseini et al., 2019). The findings are also consistent with earlier researches which revealed that unfair treatment and financial problems leads to serious mental health consequences for married women (Lincoln & Chae, 2010).

As hypothesized in hypothesis 3, marital satisfaction is negatively related with psychological distress among married people. Findings of study supported the third hypothesis that marital satisfaction was negatively related with psychological distress among married people. Literature suggests that marital satisfaction was significantly and negatively associated with psychological distress. (Li et al., 2016). These findings are consistent with prior researches which revealed that strong relationship exists between marital dissatisfaction and psychological distress (Ofovwue et al., 2013). Depression was negatively related with marital satisfaction (Kouros et al., 2008) and this relationship was found stronger for married women as compared to married men (Whisman, 2001). Another study concluded that there was negative association between marital adjustment and mental health problems in married women (Abbas et al., 2019).

The findings of the present study are consistent with earlier research which was conducted on married adults in Japan and concluded that positive and negative aspects of marital satisfaction are significantly related with psychological distress (Li et al., 2016). The findings can be supported by earlier research which concluded that low level of marital satisfaction was related with high level of psychological distress and low level of resilience among adult women of Bangalore (Satheesan, SC et al., 2018).

As hypothesized in hypothesis 4, marital satisfaction mediates the relationship between gaslighting and psychological distress among married people. Results of the study revealed that the path from gaslighting to marital satisfaction shows a significant negative relationship ( $B = -.41, t = -7.22, p = 0.00$ ) and the path from marital satisfaction to psychological distress shows a significant negative relationship ( $B = -.33, p = 0.00$ ). The indirect effect of gaslighting on psychological distress through marital satisfaction is significant ( $B = .13, p = 0.00$ ) and the total effect of gaslighting on psychological distress, combining both direct and indirect effects, is significant ( $B = .56, p = 0.00$ ), indicating that gaslighting has an overall positive impact on psychological distress, primarily through its effect on marital satisfaction.

Results of the study are consistent with previous researches which revealed that couple violence and conflict are negatively related with marital satisfaction and marital satisfaction is negatively

related with the influence of bodily health problems (Banford et al., 2011). The results also was in agreement with another study in which marital satisfaction mediated the relationship between physical or psychological partner aggression and relationship dissolution risk (Goldfarb et al., 2007). Results of the study are consistent with previous researches which revealed that marital satisfaction acted as a mediator in association between symptoms of depression and victimization of gaslighting among married couples (Foran et al., 2012).

As hypothesized in hypothesis 5, Married women will have more gaslighting experience than married men. Results of the study supported the hypothesis that significant difference exists between married men and women in gaslighting. Findings of present study are consistent with earlier researches which showed that negative effects of intimate partner violence were not equally distributed across gender that is women suffered more from intimate partner violence as compared to men (Jung et al., 2018; Masci & Sanderson, 2017). The findings align with the assumption that men were more often considered as perpetrators of gaslighting whereas women were victims of gaslighting (Morgan, 2007).

One of prior quantitative and cross-sectional research revealed that males were more involved in gaslighting as compared to females in intimate relationship (Sohail et al., 2024). These findings are consistent with prior research which concluded that women were more likely to report victimization of intimate partner violence in comparison to men as their prevalence rate is 29.3% vs. 20.9% (Gass et al., 2011). One of prior quantitative and cross-sectional research revealed that males were more involved in gaslighting as compared to females in intimate relationship (Sohail et al., 2024). These results are consistent with previous research which concluded that approximately 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men reports intimate partner violence for life time. Married women were more likely to report higher level of intimate partner violence as well as injury related to violence in comparison to married men (Breiding et al., 2008).

The results of the present study supported all of the stated hypotheses which revealed that gaslighting is negatively associated with marital satisfaction that is further negatively associated with psychological distress. In addition, demographic variables of the study didn't show significant results except gender which indicated the role of gender in causing psychological distress among married people caused by gaslighting. Furthermore, the results of the study showed that married women were more likely to experience gaslighting within intimate relationship as compared to married men.

### Implication

The results of study can be helpful for understanding the impact of gaslighting on married women. The findings can be beneficial to develop appropriate approaches for enhancing understanding regarding gaslighting as well as its associated aspects that impacts their psychological health. Awareness through educational programs can be develop in order to help people recognize the significance to talk about gaslighting experiences of married people.

Furthermore, the research findings may be helpful to develop preventive programs for raising social awareness about the consequences of gaslighting on psychological well-being of victims. In addition, findings of study can be beneficial for policy makers to develop policies regarding domestic abuse that would increase the

security and confidence of married people. The study can help mental health professionals to develop awareness and understanding of gaslighting in order to make appropriate therapeutic interventions and strategies for helping people who are experiencing gaslighting. The findings can be applicable in clinical settings by mental health practitioners concerned about married people emotional and psychological well-being.

### Limitations and recommendations

There are some limitations in the present study that should be considered in future research. First limitation of the study is that it has small sample size but larger number of participants should be included to have representative sample. Another limitation is that most of participants belonged to urban areas, which lacks representation of population who belongs to rural areas. Moreover, married people were reluctant to report being victim of gaslighting especially married men due to stigma and inconsistency of gaslighting experiences with societal norms that may lead to inaccuracy of responses. Furthermore, the data collection was carried out from two major cities of Pakistan that could be another major limitation of the study.

The current study was primarily conducted within Pakistan due to its widespread prevalence and lack of awareness. The results can be considered as a baseline for further future research that is future research studies should consider rural areas for data collection in order to have equal representation of different areas of Pakistan. Additionally, different cities of Pakistan should be included in future research in order to diversify the sample. Moreover, future research studies should consider the impact of media on increase in gaslighting by married men on their partners within context of Pakistan. Furthermore, cultural as well as ethnic aspects should be considered in the future research to investigate cultural variance on gaslighting. Future studies could consider some other variables such as social support, self-esteem, personality traits of people that makes them vulnerable to experience gaslighting. Furthermore, future research studies should investigate the effectiveness of different therapeutic interventions in order to enhance marital satisfaction and reduce psychological distress in marital relationships due to gaslighting.

### Conclusion

The major findings of the study were relationship between demographic variables and gaslighting as well as psychological distress. Results of the study showed that there is positive relationship between gaslighting and psychological distress and marital satisfaction mediated the relationship between gaslighting and psychological distress. Furthermore, the findings of the present study indicated that the significant mean difference existed between married men and women regarding experience of gaslighting and its subsequent effects on psychological distress.

**Conflict of Interest:** None to declare

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