

## **ENVIRONMENTAL AND PERSONAL FACTORS AS PREDICTORS OF MARITAL ADJUSTMENT- AN INVESTIGATION IN PAKISTANI CONTEXT**

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**ABSTRACT:** Every individual wants to be gratified in his/her relations including marriage. Marriage is an important part of one's life as it effects social as well as emotional functioning of an individual. The present study aims to measure to investigate the roles of In-laws (experience with in- laws, husband's supportive attitude and marital adjustment) in married life using correlation design. The questionnaires were given to 100 married women using snowball technique. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 16. The obtained results indicated a statistically significant positive relationship between the studied variables. Moreover, the study revealed a notable information about the role of relationship between the experience with in-laws and husband's supportive attitude as a significant factor for successful marital adjustment and in developing a healthy relationship with in-laws. The study has implication for marriage counselors.

**KEYWORDS:** Experience with in- laws, husband's supportive attitude, marital adjustment, married women.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Marriage is a fundamental aspect that significantly affects the functioning of one's life including social, emotional, cultural and economic well-being. Marriage brings two people together as husband and wife who commit to bear and rear children together (Girgis, George, & Anderson, 2010). It is a long-live commitment that creates the strongest bond between man and women in a social context. Therefore, it is essential that married get to live a satisfied and happy marital life. There are underpinning variety of perspectives regarding marriage, for instance, at a government level, marriage is perceived as an institution that benefits society via providing human civilization which strictly facilitate and ensure the well-being of the children. However, on the other hand, government does not create marriage; rather, it is a natural practice which follows norms and regulations (Anderson, 2013). In the contemporary Asian society marriage is perceived as more about children needs than adults' desires. Thus associates marriage with intense emotional attachment rather a legal and civil liberties (Hendry, 2010).

Marital adjustment is an important area of research due to the higher probability of divorce and separation. The goal of the study is to investigate how experience with in laws and the husband's protective attitude towards his wife is going to predict marital adjustment among married women. Marital adjustment is thought to be influenced by many factors, in which experience with in laws and husband's attitude are very important but unfortunately it had been under-researched in Pakistan.

In general, adjustment in marriage is a crucial phenomenon, otherwise maladjustment has often resulted in countless unhappy and mal-adjustment in marriages. In order, to get a deeper understanding on a body of knowledge a study aims to measure the prominent contributing factors that play a fundamental role in well adjusting a the marital life. The variable of interest are experience with in-laws, husband' supportive attitude and marital adjustment among married women.

## 2 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

### 2.1 Social cognitive theory

Social cognitive theory posits that interaction is the result of reciprocal determinism which explains mutually influencing connection of overlapping factors namely environmental, personal and behavioural. Environmental factors refer to external stimuli that trigger personal factor and consequently resulted in bringing behaviour explicit. Personal factors refer to affective, cognitive characteristics, attachment, and personality traits whereas behavioural factors refer to behavioural intentions. Modifying the underpinning concept of reciprocal determinism into present study it can be elaborated as:

1. Environmental factors refers to experience with in-laws whereby numerous components are studied namely mother in-law, father in-law, son in-law and sister in-law. Personal factors refer to husband supportive attitude. Behavioral factors refer to marital adjustment.

The modified variables into reciprocal determinism; a theory of social cognitivism is illustrated in Figure 1.

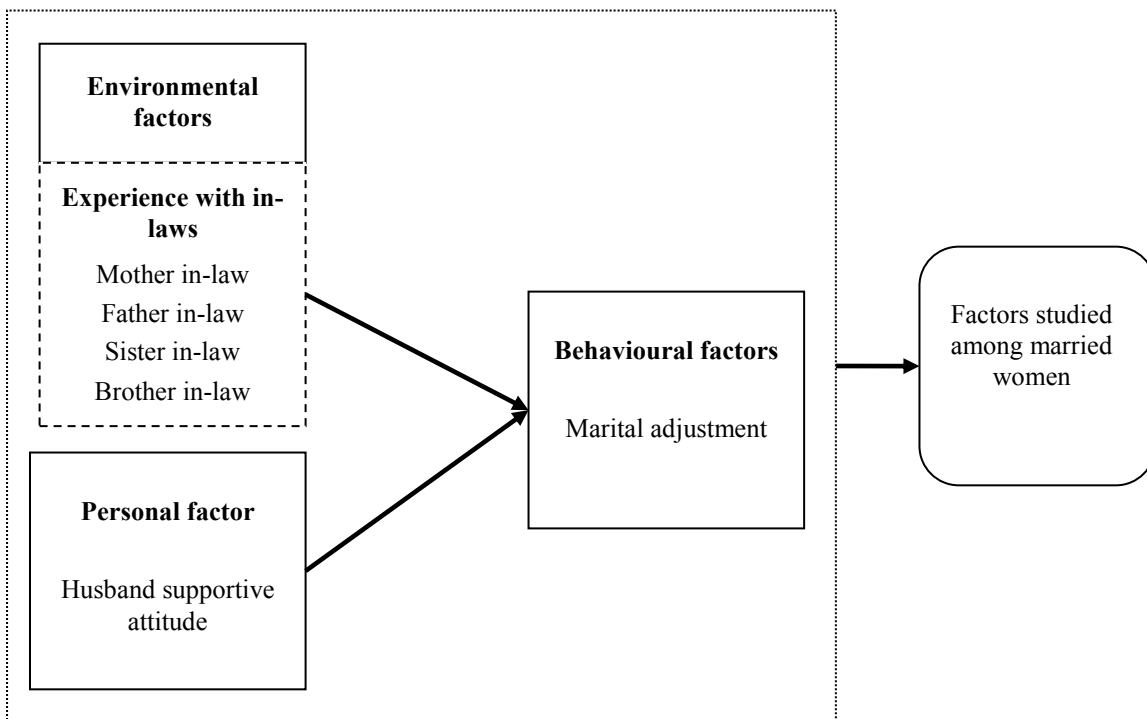


Figure 1: Adopted conceptual framework from social cognitive theory

#### Environmental factors: experience with in-laws

In this section environmental factors refers to four components mainly mother in-law, father in-law, sister in-law and brother in-law. However, mother in-law is considered as a major contributing factor among in-laws in a couple (Fatima and Ajmal, 2012). Fatima and Ajmal (2012) revealed that marriage is not merely result of bounding between two people rather it is a connection between two families. Therefore, spouse should

respect each other's families. Meanwhile, in Asian culture, it is common conception that in-laws of a woman play a vital role in the mutual relationship of husband and wife, since a wife has to live not only with her and but also with his family. Thus, if in-laws are harsh and unkind towards wife, this can play vigorous part in making husband and wife relationship weak by creating misunderstandings and might cause several problems. This would eventually result in adverse effects on husband-wife relationship. Other than, if in-laws are caring and understanding they can contribute in flourishing the relationship. Among these four identified variables (Figure 1) in experience with mother-in-law, mother in-law is most influencing factors. Mother in-law refers to the two women who are mothers in-laws to each other married children; a person who has a legal affinity with being the parent of the other spouse (Girgis, George, & Anderson, 2010).

There is a preconception regarding mother-in-law that she has a significant role in making a married life either success or failure. Research has supported the notion that in most of the cases it has been observed that mother in-law usually play a negative role and often become a major cause of break down in many marriages. Numerous etiologies of breaking down of marriages have been traced to the nosy poker, antagonist of daughter in-law and overbearing attitude of mother-in-law (Volling, 2012; Fatima and Ajmal, 2012). The reason why mother in-laws is assumed like that depends on the pre-assumption she made before marriage of his son as marriage called it the clash of fantasy a mother had as she wants to be authoritarian and decision maker to son's life. It is a general immediate arise expectation towards daughter in-law after a marriage is not only a sincere wife but also an obedient daughter in-law. Besides, mother in-law has characteristics of a mother therefore her behavior towards daughter in-law abruptly change when she gave birth to either baby boy or girl depends on cultural influences baby. A married woman enters into marriage not only as a wife but also as an obedient daughter-in-law, who is committed to serve and obey her husband's parents and close relatives" (Datta, Poortinga, & Marcoen, 2003). Based on these social expectations, establishing a good relationship with her mother-in-law is an important task in a woman's marital adjustment. A high level of conflict with her mother-in-law may make her feel unable to fulfill societal expectations and may create stress in her marital life.

## **ii) Personal factors: husband supportive attitude**

Husband's supportive attitude is divided into two models namely relationship-enhancement model and multidimensional model of support. Relationship enhancement model (Cutrona, Russell, & Gardner, 2005) posits that spouse support specifically husband's support in every aspect of life enhances partners physical and mental well-being which resulted in marital stability and satisfaction. The impact of partner support on marital satisfaction depend on explicit behaviors exhibits either during support transactions or perceptions of the support received. Consequently, the impact of support on relationship functioning is not limited to the shorter span of time rather it's longitudinal course of the relations. A multidimensional model Barry et al., (2009) asserts that support is comprised of five dimensions namely: Informational, emotional, esteem, tangible and network. Since informational and tangible support is linked with taking wise decisions therefore this support involves in solving a problem. In addition, emotional and esteemed has been conceptualized as a form of nurturing support as emotional support can be seen via behavioural indicators such as hugs or pats on the back, listening and empathizing. Thus it provides emotional and moral comfort to the individual who is coping with a problem. The explanation of the dimensions is given below in Table 1.

**Table 1: The dimensions of husband support**

Sr	Dimensions	Explanation
1	Informational	Informational refers to advice and guidance given by husband
2	Emotional	Emotional dimension refers to the level of comfort and security provided by husband.
3	Esteem	Esteem refers to the confidence in one's ability to handle a problem.
4	Tangible	Tangible refers to the either direct or indirect instrumental assistance.
5	Network	Network support refers to the sense of belonging to an interpersonal network.

(Source: Cutrona & Suhr,1992)

### iii) Behavioural factors: Marital adjustment

Marital adjustment is the process in which partners adapt and change to their new roles acting as a team. Well-adjusted marriages are considered to last for a long time, whereas poorly adjusted ones end in divorce (Halford, 2011). Marital adjustment is a combination of husband and wife's attitude and acts that in agreement about the major issues of family. The major issues may include dealing with in-laws, handling family finances, religious practices, sharing the household responsibilities, expression of love, amusement, expressing love, friends and close relations (Fatima & Ajmal 2012). Marital adjustment is conceptualized as the amount of similarity between the expectations a person has and the rewards the person receives. The important component of marital adjustment is marital satisfaction (Robles et al., 2014). Marital adjustment is considered to be affected many factors such as communication style, educational level, humor, personality, sexual satisfaction, family structure and duration of marriage the brief explanation of which are discussed below in the Table 2.

**Table 2: Showing the factors affecting marital adjustment**

Sr no	Factors affecting marital adjustment	Explanation
1	Communication style	High level of negativity, criticism and disagreement between partners results in weakening couple marital adjustment. Therefore the partners should communicate positively avoiding criticism and disagreement (Halford, 2011).
2	Educational level	Previous researches have shown that the higher the level of education of the partners, higher will be their marital adjustment (Ansari, 2003).
3	Humor	Individual who are satisfied in their marriage report that their spouses have a good sense of humor (Martin, 2010).
4	Personality	Persons who are emotionally stable are thought to be more adjusted in their lives (Khalatbari et al., 2013).
5	Sexual satisfaction	Marital adjustment is closely related to sexual satisfaction. Partners who are sexually satisfied with from their spouses have more satisfied marriages (Yeh et al., 2006).
6	Family structure	People whose parents are divorced are more likely to experience divorce themselves (Wallerstein & Kelly 2008)
7	Duration of relationship	Before getting married people who dated longer, reported to have greater satisfaction later in their marriage (Adler, Vasiliadis & Bickell 2010)

Marital adjustment has also been explained under many theoretical bases. According to equity theory if an individual think that he is treated fairly i.e, the amount of input is equal to the amount of output he receives he is well adjusted in his relationship. This phenomenon can also be illustrated in terms of an equation given below:

$$\frac{\text{individual's outcomes}}{\text{individual's own inputs}} = \frac{\text{relational partner's outcomes}}{\text{relational partner's inputs}}$$

Here input shows partners contribution to the relational exchange and outcomes are considered as the positive and negative consequences of that an individual perceives a person has acquire as a consequence of his relationship with another (Guerrero, Andersen, and Afifi.,2007).

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research design**

The current study made use of correlational research design. The correlation research design measures the strength and the direction of relationship between two variables; i.e. X variable and Y variable. The correlation coefficient refers to r-value. The ultimate goal of every analysis is to find association between variables. The art of states in philosophy of science that there is no other way of representing “meaning” except in terms of relation between some quantities or qualities therefore, correlation coefficient between variables is determined (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2006).

#### **3.2 Instruments**

Primary data was gathered using available instruments. Developing a new standard, reliable and valid instrument is time consuming process and newly developed might not possess psychometric properties therefore existing available instruments were used. For the purpose, three psychological variables namely experience with in-laws, husband supportive attitude and marital adjustment were investigated. Experience with in-laws scale, an indigenous scale was used to measure components of experience with in-laws. Husband’s supportive attitude scale, an indigenous scale was used to measure husband’s supportive attitude. Marital happiness scale was adapted and used to measure marital adjustment among married women. These instruments were self-report questionnaire based on 6 point Likert scale. The selected instruments are mainly based on content validity and on the reasoning of the content.

Furthermore Gall, Borg & Gall (2003) mentioned that, reliability refers to “the extent to which other researchers would arrive at similar results if they studied the same case using exactly the same procedures” as the initial researchers (p. 596). A test or instrument is considered to be reliable if the results are persistent. The current study concerned with the measures on psychological attributes namely: experience with in-laws, husband’s supportive attitude and marital adjustment. The significance level was set at  $p < .05$ . Reliability analysis using Cronbach’s alpha was used to determine the reliabilities of selected variables of the study. Cronbach’s alpha is a reliability coefficient which indicates the intercorrelation between the items in a set. The closer the Cronbach alpha is to 1, the higher the internal consistency reliability. The Cronbach’s Alpha is considered as appropriate reliability statistics due to the number of choices within the Likert scale (Jones, 2007). Afterwards the resulted coefficient alpha was compared with the pre-existing estimated reliabilities. The obtained reliability coefficient of each instrument is illustrated in the Table 3 which gives depiction on the reliability coefficient obtained. The description summarized the number of the items; the estimated obtained from the data collection on the instruments which indicating adequate reliabilities based on the previous researches evidence.

**Table 3: The estimated reliabilities on the research instruments**

Sr no.	Variables	Items	$\alpha$ (estimated reliability)
1	Experience with in laws	60	.86
2	Husband supportive Attitude	23	.89
3	Marital Adjustment	31	.94

### 3.2.1 Experience with in-laws scale

Indigenous scale was used (Lashari & Amjad, 2014). The scale was designed to evaluate married women experience with in-laws. The scale was consisted of 60 items which was rated on 6 Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) respectively. 60 items of experience with in-laws scale was statistically clustered into 4 subscales (as listed in Table 4).

**Table 4: The four clusters or sub scales of Experience with in-law**

No.	Items grouped in subscales	Experience with in-law subscale	
1	1*, 2, 3, 4*, 5, 6*, 7*, 8*, 9*, 10*, 11*, 12*, 13*, 14*, 15	Mother in-law	MIL
2	16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30.	Father in-law	FIL
3	31, 32*, 33*, 34, 35, 36*, 37*, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43*, 44*, 45*.	Sister in-law	SIL
4	46*, 47*, 48, 49, 50*, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55*, 56, 57*, 58*, 59, 60.	Brother in-law	BIL

\*items are reverse coded

(Source: Lashari and Amjad, 2014)

The operational definition of experience with in-laws is scores obtained by the respondents on the experience with in-laws scale. A high score indicates that a person tends to have a positive experience with in-laws while a low score indicates that a person tends to negative experience with in-laws. The maximum score that can be on experience with in-laws scale is 360 and the minimum score is 60 which is equivalent to 1 to 6 on the Likert scale whereas a score of 180 (equivalent to 3 on Likert scale) is considered as an average score.

### 3.2.2 Husband's supportive attitude scale

An Indigenous scale was developed comprising of 23 items at the University of the Punjab, Lahore Pakistan. The scale was intended to measure husband supportive attitude towards married women. The response format of husband's supportive attitude scale was decided a Likert type 6-point scale (1 = strongly agree, 2= disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 =slightly agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree) allowing clear rating. Few items were reverse coded (as listed in Table 5) which means that higher score on this items indicates low husband support.

The operational definition of husband's supportive attitude is scores obtained by the respondents on the husband's supportive attitude scale. A high score indicates that a person tends to have a positive husband's supportive attitude while a low score indicates that a person tends to relatively less positive husband's supportive attitude. The maximum score that can be on the husband's supportive attitude scale is 138 and the minimum score is 23 which is equivalent to 1 to 6 on the Likert scale whereas a score of 69 (equivalent to 3 on Likert scale) is considered as an average score.

**Table 5: Showing reverse coded items in husband's supportive attitude scale**

Item no	Statements
7	I feel he is not assertive enough in front of his mother
8	I find it difficult to really open up when I talk with my husband
11	I hardly ever have heart to heart conversation with my husband
14	I have not experienced a warm and trusting relationship with my husband
18	His attitude is biased when it comes to situations of conflict between me and my in laws
20	he never accepts any fault of his own family
21	I get very frustrated by his lack of support for me in his family

### 3.2.3 Marital happiness scale

In order to assess the marital adjustment, marital happiness scale was adapted and used which was developed by Hassan & Amjad (2014). The scale comprises of 31 items. Responses are made on 5 point Likert scale that ranges from 1(strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Items 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 25 and 29 were negative items therefore they were scored in reverse scoring manner. The maximum score that can be on the marital happiness scale is 155 and the minimum score is 31 which is equivalent to 1 to 5 on the Likert scale whereas a score of 93 (equivalent to 3 on Likert scale) is considered as an average score. After getting the responses from the participants, the total numbers of responses are added to get a score on marital happiness.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result Section gives explanation on frequencies obtained on both positive and negative items in experience with in law scale and the correlation between selected variables of the study.

### Frequencies on experience with in law scale

The analysis of the data has been carried out by using statistical packages of social sciences (SPSS) version 20. Several statistical procedures (i.e. reliability analysis, descriptive statistics (e.g. frequencies) and correlations were used to analyzed data. Table 6 displays the frequencies of positive items in experience with in-laws scale.

**Table 6: Showing frequency of positive items in experience with in laws scale**

Item	Frequency of responses					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Mother in law						

Is silent natured	9	27	12	20	28	9
Is friendly	4	15	11	29	35	6
Is like a mother	7	16	14	28	28	7
Is loving	36	32	19	9	6	8
Father in law						
Is fatherly	5	7	2	19	51	16
Loving	2	6	7	18	50	17
Good person	1	7	2	12	55	23
Nice person	1	6	2	10	58	23
Very polite	2	8	5	18	48	19
Religious person	2	8	5	18	47	20
Decent man	2	8	5	18	48	19
Neutral person	3	5	4	15	46	27
Quiet natured	3	4	3	14	51	25
Is a calm personality	3	15	8	16	40	18
Humble	7	13	13	16	39	12
Kind	4	13	10	17	38	18
Does favor for daughter in-law	2	9	6	16	46	15
Is supportive towards daughter in-law	3	8	4	24	42	19
Sister in law						
Is a friend	8	9	9	28	40	6
Is good natured	9	10	10	23	42	6
Is caring	7	14	8	28	37	6
Is supportive	8	16	10	35	28	3
Is a helper	9	17	11	27	32	4
Is like a sister	11	16	11	20	40	2
Brother in law						
Is a pampered child	2	8	36	10	25	15
Is hardworking	6	11	9	21	44	9
Is jobless	17	9	13	44	15	2
Is sensible	1	13	12	23	41	10
Is non serious	1	34	19	12	20	14
Is fun loving	1	11	12	16	45	15
Is friendly	1	14	9	25	41	10
Are like family members	2	9	8	14	54	13
Are like brothers	2	12	6	15	53	12
Are caring	1	18	1	15	55	10

Table 7 displays the frequencies of negative items in experience with in-laws scale.

Table 7: Showing frequency of negative items in experience with in laws scale (N=100)

Item	Frequency of responses					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree



<b>Mother in law</b>						
Is a tricky person to deal with	42	21	11	15	6	5
Is conflict	19	32	14	28	4	3
Is difficult to handle	21	21	25	18	6	9
Is unpredictable	31	24	13	14	4	14
Is rude	15	27	17	33	5	3
Is sober person	34	22	16	14	3	11
Is stubborn	21	29	13	23	4	10
Is clever	30	22	16	13	7	12
Is arrogant	24	18	16	13	7	12
Is a strict lady in discipline matters	24	18	16	31	5	6
Is non caring	26	12	20	30	7	5
<b>Sister in law</b>						
Is difficult to handle	23	22	23	11	9	12
Exploits the relationship	16	22	19	28	7	8
Sister in-law is frustration	16	22	19	28	7	8
Is a source of tension	14	22	17	35	3	9
Is problematic	15	19	17	30	8	11
My sister in-law indifferent	27	17	14	23	9	10
<b>Brother in law</b>						
Is a source of tension	11	41	10	13	21	4
Is attention seeker	30	17	23	25	9	6
Is spent thrift	19	25	21	22	4	9
Naughty	35	17	10	21	1	16
Like to be pleased	46	19	8	16	2	9

#### 4.2 Correlations between selected variables

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationship between the psychological variables namely experience with in-laws, husband's supportive attitude and marital adjustment. Three hypotheses were tested to examine the relationship between selected variables.

The tested hypotheses were given below.

$H_{01}$ : There is no significant correlation between experience with in-law and husband's supportive attitude.

$H_{02}$ : There is no significant relationship between experience with in-law and marital adjustment.

$H_{03}$ : There is no significant relationship between husband's supportive attitude and marital adjustment.

Table 8 illustrated the obtained correlation coefficient among the research variables.

**Table 8: The correlation coefficient among research variables in the sample (N=100)**

Correlation coefficient							
	EIL	MIL	FIL	SIL	BIL	HSA	MA
EIL	1	.518**	.735**	.702**	.653**	.462**	.345**

MIL	.518**	1	.002	.187	.294**	.235*	.197
FIL	.735**	.002	1	.379**	.298**	.465**	.335**
SIL	.702**	.187	.379**	1	.317**	.309**	.138
BIL	.653**	.294**	.298**	.317**	1	.094	.182
HAS	.462**	.235*	.465**	.309**	.094	1	.619**
MA	.345**	.197	.335**	.138	.182	.619**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Legend:

EIL: experience with in-law.

MIL: mother in-law.

FIL: father in-law.

SIS: sister in-law.

BIL: brother in-law.

HSA: husband supportive attitude.

MA: marital adjustment.

Field (2005) claimed that the correlation matrix range varies with the relatively low (value at .30 or less) to medium (values at .30 or more) to large (values at .50 or large) which indicates that the contents of the items are precise and accurate. The result finding on the correlation coefficient describes that the obtained correlation on the selected variables is adequate based on the suggestion given by Field (2005). Wang, Slaney, & Rice (2007) states that cultural influence is a contributing factor particularly considering Asian society into account whereby daughter in-law are brought up by bearing in their mind to obey and accept their in-laws decisions. Despite the fact that daughter in-laws' resistance to in-laws' expectations or decisions is regarded as disrespectful and may be criticized or punished (Yeh & Bedford, 2003). Consequently, a woman is expected to obey her in-law, to view in order to have a successful marital life

Table 7 reveals a statistically significant positive correlation between experience with in-law and marital adjustment ( $r = .345, n = 100, p < 0.01$ ). This finding is consistent with the finding by Wang, Slaney, & Rice (2007) and (Yeh & Bedford, 2003)

A statistically significant positive relationship was also found (Table 7) between husband and marital adjustment ( $r = .619, n = 100, p < 0.01$ ). Research has supported the notion that husband support is one of the key factors affecting the well-being of marriage which in-turned resulted in strong bonding between husband and wife (Cutrona, Russell, & Gardner, 2005). Besides, if husband has not a supportive attitude towards wife than adjustment in a marriage is often become difficult. Thus, married couples face stress, conflict and lack of believe in their ability to cope effectively with their married life.

The result of the data analysis on association indicates a significant positive correlation between experience with in laws and husband's supportive husband and marital adjustment (Figure 2). In brief all  $H_0$  are rejected indicating that there is a statistically significant relationship between the psychological variables of the study.

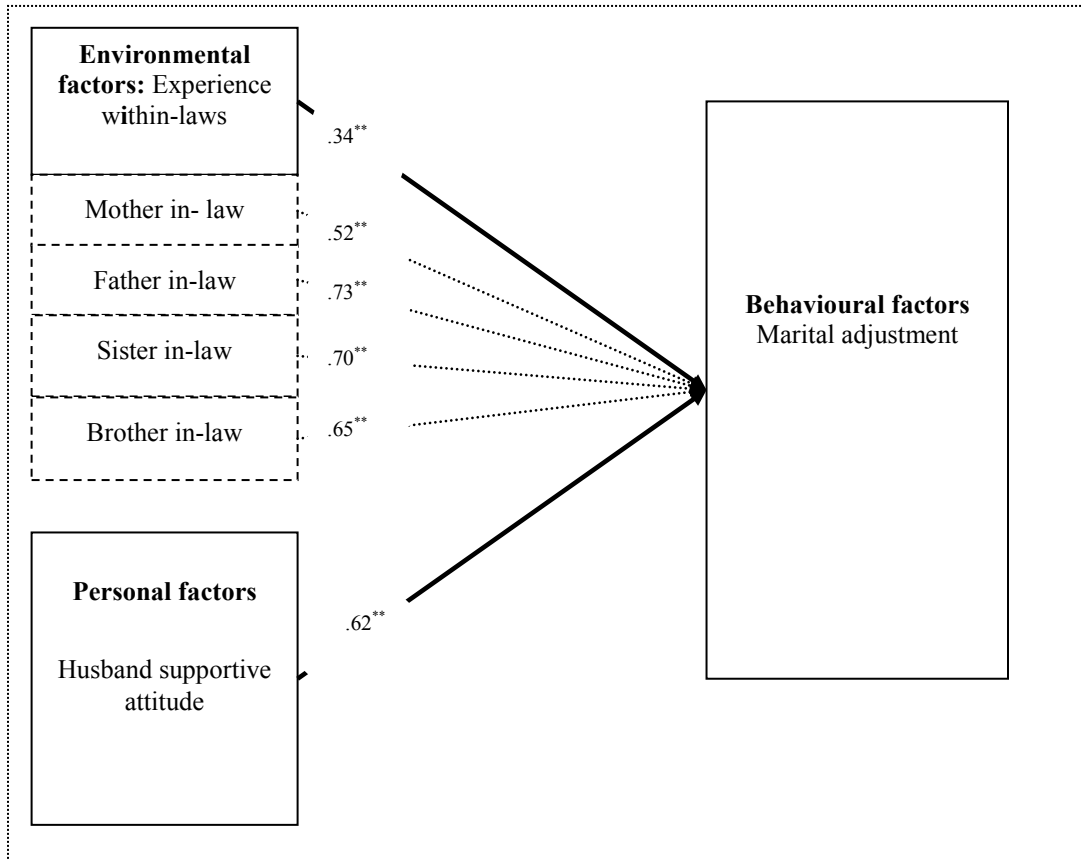


Figure 2: The correlation coefficient among studied variables

Every individual wants to be satisfied and well-adjusted in his relations including intimate relations such as marriage. Marriage is an important part of everyone's life as it not only effects the social but as well as emotional functioning of an individual. The aim of the present study was finding out the relationship between experience with in-laws, husband's supportive attitude and marital adjustment among married women. The results of the analysis showed that there is a significant relationship among studied variables. These results will prove beneficial for the marital counselors as variables that are causing hindrances in well-adjusted marital life can be overcome and therefore healthy relationship can be developed.

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