

A Study on the Relationship between Feminism, Gender Roles and Marital Adjustment among Mizo Married Couples

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Abstract—The study aims to throw a light on the relationships between feminism, gender roles and marital adjustment. The sample consisting of 50 couples (N=100) were drawn from Mizo population between 20 to 69 years of age. The applicability of the translated version of the measures of FEM scale (FEM Scale; Smith, Ferree & Miller, 1975), TMF scale (The Traditional Masculinity and Femininity scale; Kachel, Steffens & Niedlich, 2016) and Consensus, Satisfaction and Cohesion subscales of RDAS (Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale; Busby, Christiansen, Crane & Larson, 1995) was determined. The original and the translated versions show high correlation coefficients. The internal consistency for TMF emerged to be highly robust and that of RDAS and FEM to be acceptable over the levels of analyses. Gender differences emerged with higher scores for females as compared to males on TMF, and the reverse was observed on FEM and the satisfaction subscale of RDAS. Duration of marriage significantly predicted lower consensus and satisfaction while social involvement significantly predicted higher cohesion between the couples. Age, monthly income, family size, family type and duration of marriage significantly predicted marital adjustment.

Keywords: *Feminism, Gender roles, marital adjustment.*

Introduction

In a highly communitarian society like Mizoram where social life is free and men and women co-exist freely despite all the social freedom and the significant contributions in the family, women are not liberated and they are regarded as subordinate to men and they are discriminated against in various aspects of life (Lalhriatpuii, 2010)^[1]. However, due to modernization and rapid changing of lifestyles, various developments can be seen in the Mizo society especially in terms of providing legal provision and other opportunities in favour of women which brings about a change for the Mizo women who are bounded by the strict patriarchal tradition in the family.

Religion has brought about a profound change in the social relationship in the Mizo society Opportunities have been

opened for women but in a limited way. Modernisation is largely argued in terms of material culture, whereas 'traditionalism' still largely influences the Mizo society at the level of consciousness and ideas. (Gangte, 2011)^[2]. Women began to be counted and they began to play an important role in the religious and social life. Emancipation of women is one of the most remarkable changes that religion brought in the Mizo society (Malsawma, 2002)^[3].

Since the last few decades the traditional society of India and the status of women have been undergoing a series of changes. Urbanisation, education, migration and other socio-economic factors are changing the original arena of Indian society and female participation in different areas and employment pattern in India. Similarly, in all parts of Mizoram, there are more females than males to be seen managing and running shops, tea stalls, restaurants and other variety stores to make a living. The millennial women in Mizo society are now very much independent and the conditions have improved immensely compared to the past though there is a lot of changes need to be made. The traditional gender roles have changed and the societal norms are not as rigid like before. They hold great responsibilities not only in the family but also at workplaces, women are now aware that they can follow their dreams, fulfil their goals, keeping their options open and decide when and whom they should marry. But being a patriarchal society, the father is the head of the household and most business is usually registered in his name (Colbert, 2008)^[4].

Feminism is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes (Brunett & Burkell, 2019)^[5]. It is grounded on the belief that women are equal to men. The term itself is often contested and a number of misconceptions have been raised in what it really means and implies-i.e. equal rights and opportunities for women that are equal to those of men. Equal however does not mean identical. In this dynamic

and ever changing world, feminism for each woman may be interpreted in many ways and empower them in ways of decision-making, lifestyle, career etc. According to the old Mizo custom, marriage is an important institution in the society that is vitally necessary to maintain the continuity of the clan and their culture, customs and traditions. The sole exception are the handicapped or the mentally ill, not because there are regulations attached against marrying a handicap or mentally ill individuals in the laws but because of the complication they may face in marrying. Marriage for the Mizo is a civil contract (Shakespeare, 1912)^[6].

Gender plays a crucial role in marriage. Gender refers to “behaviours, expectations, and role sets defined by society as masculine or feminine which are embodied in the behaviour of the individual man or woman and culturally regarded as appropriate to males or females”. These beliefs are taught to children and modelled through processes of socialization, leading to restrictive attitudes and behaviours. When men or women engage in behaviours that are incongruent with their perceived gender, they may be punished or devalued for their deviations from their traditional roles. These processes often lead to a restriction in behaviours that become more aligned with their gender role. While the feminine gender role is characterized by expressiveness, empathy, and passivity, the masculine gender role is characterized by restricted emotionality, socialized control, homophobia, restrictive sexual and affectionate behaviour, independence, and assertiveness (Bem, 1975; O’Neill, 1981; Harris, 1994)^[7-9]. Although gender roles have been conceptualized in a number of ways, contemporary views conceptualize gender roles as the behavioural characteristics associated with being male or female. Early research often used the terminology sex roles to describe gender roles. According to Schoen et al. (2002)^[10], marital satisfaction is a global evaluation of the state of one’s marriage and a reflection of marital happiness and functioning. From an evolutionary perspective, marital satisfaction can be viewed as a psychological state of regulated mechanisms that monitor the benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person (Shackelford and Buse, 2000)^[11].

Constantinople (1973)^[12] defines gender-role adoption as the actual manifestation (i.e., how masculine-feminine a person considers her- or himself) and gender-role preference as the desired degree of masculinity-femininity (i.e., how masculine-feminine a person ideally would like to be). Support for and opposition to feminism might be partially explained by gender role identity. Research has shown that feminists are frequently construed as unfeminine (Alexander & Ryan, 1997; Caplan, 1985; Henderson-King & Stewart, 1994)^[13-15] and as possessing masculine traits such as aggressiveness (Rubin, 1994)^[16]. Although there is less research on why men might be hesitant to consider themselves feminists, research has shown that the label “feminist” remains coded as female (Williams & Wittig, 1997)^[17]. As a result, highly masculine men may have found the label “feminist” inconsistent with their gender role identity. In an early study Mezydlo and Betz (1980)^[18]

compared feminist and non-feminist perceptions of ideal men and women. Both feminist and non-feminist men and women described an ideal man as highly masculine. However, feminists described an ideal woman as possessing masculine characteristics.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between feminism, gender roles and marital adjustment. There are several shortcomings in research to date in the Mizo population that limit the strength of the conclusion that gender roles are related to attitudes toward feminism nor is marital adjustment and the socio demographics which might explain the current scenario in Mizoram. There is limited empirical evidence available concerning the relationships among gender role identity, support for feminism, and willingness to consider one a feminist and marital adjustment.

Methods and Procedure

Sample

50 Mizo couples with 50 male and 50 female (N=100) with age range of 20 - 69 from Aizawl city serves as participants for the study of the relationship between feminism, gender roles and marital adjustment.

Psychological Tools

FEM (Smith, Ferree & Miller, 1975)^[19] scale is a 20 item scale measuring attitudes toward feminism. The items provide a convenient attitude measure and the items are in Likert format with 5 response alternatives and deal with the acceptance or rejection of central beliefs of feminism rather than attitudes towards avowed feminists. Higher score for the total scale means lower feminist attitude. The Traditional Masculinity and Femininity (TMF) scale (Kachel, Steffens, & Niedlich, 2016)^[20] is a 6-item measure with each item rated on a Likert-type scale from 1 (totally masculine) to 7 (totally feminine) that assesses for gender role in the areas of gender role adoption, gender-role preference, and gender-role identity. The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) Busby, Christiansen, Crane & Larson, 1995)^[21] is a self report questionnaire that assesses seven dimensions of couple relationships within three overarching categories including Consensus in decision making, values and affection. Satisfaction in relationship with respect to stability and conflict regulation, and Cohesion is seen through activities and discussion. Higher score in the scale indicates higher marital adjustment and lower scores indicates marital distress or adjustment.

Procedure

A to B version of the three psychological tools (FEM, TMF, and RDAS) was handed out to translation experts. The scores on the translated version (B Version) was obtained after informed consent was obtained assuring them in maintaining confidentiality and keeping in mind the ethical considerations. The data obtained were screened, cleansed and coded for further analysis.

Statistical Analyses

Psychometric properties of each of the scale and/or sub-scales of the psychological measures were ascertained. The data analyses also included descriptive statistics, Independent t-test, correlation and stepwise multiple regression.

Results and Discussions

Table-1: The mean, standard deviation, range of item-total correlation and Cronbach's alpha of the scales/sub-scales of FEM, TMF and RDAS.

	Gender	Mean	SD	Range item-total correlation	α
FEM	Male	51.26 (49.22)	6.58 (7.08)	.36 - .65 (.26 - .74)	.84 (.84)
	Female	49.10 (46.16)	7.41 (7.34)	.36 - .63 (.27 - .69)	.85 (.80)
TMF	Male	13.22 (12.56)	7.08 (7.87)	.73 - .90 (.78 - .93)	.95 (.96)
	Female	30.26 (30.12)	7.99 (8.50)	.77 - .88 (.77 - .91)	.95 (.96)
Consensus of RDAS	Male	24.38 (25.04)	6.83 (5.89)	.82 - .90 (.81 - .88)	.95 (.95)
	Female	24.96 (24.60)	5.34 (5.05)	.60 - .77 (.67 - .78)	.89 (.89)
Satisfaction of RDAS	Male	16.42 (16.20)	2.21 (2.02)	.54 - .66 (.37 - .59)	.79 (.61)
	Female	15.69 (15.48)	2.29 (2.23)	.51 - .55 (.33 - .49)	.73 (.61)
Cohesion of RDAS	Male	12.84 (12.18)	4.35 (3.91)	.26 - .84 (-.01 - .79)	.84 (.77)
	Female	13.00 (12.00)	4.19 (4.30)	.33 - .82 (.28 - .78)	.82 (.81)

The results (Table 1) highlighted the mean, standard deviation, range of item-total correlation coefficients and the Cronbach's alpha of the scale/sub-scales of FEM, TMF and RDAS. The range of item-total correlation coefficients and the Cronbach's alpha guaranteed highly robust validity and reliability of the items and the scales and/or sub-scales of FEM, TMF and RDAS for measurement purposes in the target sample.

The original set of items was correlated with the translated version for each of the scales/sub-scales of FEM, TMF and RDAS. The correlation coefficients emerged to be highly acceptable for FEM ($r=.77^{**}; p<.01$), TMF ($r=.82^{**}; p<.01$), subscales of RDAS- Consensus ($r=.76^{**}; p<.01$), Satisfaction ($r=.69^{**}; p<.01$) and Cohesion ($r=.78^{**}; p<.01$) providing the validity of the scales and/or sub-scales of the psychological tools for measurement in the target sample.

Table-2: The product-moment correlation coefficients of the scales/sub-scales of FEM, TMF and RDAS for the male (upper diagonal) and female (lower diagonal) samples.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. FEM	---	-.18	.02	-.13	.01
2. TMF	.04	---	-.24	.23	.14
3. Consensus of RDAS	-.07	.07	---	-.08	.08
4. Satisfaction of RDAS	-.03	-.00	.15	---	.45**
5. Cohesion of RDAS	-.14	.10	.39**	.38**	---

*** is Significant at .01 level*

The result (Table 2) shows the product moment correlation coefficients of the scales/subscales of FEM, TMF and RDAS. For males, significant positive correlation coefficients emerged in the sub-scale of RDAS – Cohesion and Satisfaction ($r=.45^{**}; p<.01$) and for females, significant positive correlation correlations emerged in the subscale of RDAS- Consensus and Cohesion ($r=.39^{**}; p<.01$) and Satisfaction and Cohesion ($r=.38; p<.01$). The findings provided evidence for the similarity of the direction of the sub-scales of RDAS as reported in literature by Isanezhad et.al. (2012)^[22].

Table-3: The results of t-tests for the 'Gender' differences on the scales/sub-scales of FEM, TMF and RDAS.

	Levene's Test		t-test	
	F	Sig.	T	Sig. (2 tailed)
FEM	1.07	.30	.27	.01**
TMF	1.19	.28	-15.59	.00**
Consensus of RDAS	1.21	.27	-.09	.93
Satisfaction of RDAS	.64	.43	2.36	.02*
Cohesion of RDAS	.00	.95	.18	.86

*** is Significant at .01 level; * is Significant at .05 level*

Results (Table 3) also revealed that males ($\bar{x}=51.26; \sigma=6.58$) scored higher in FEM compared to females ($\bar{x}=46.16; \sigma=7.34$) which reveals that males are lower in feminism and have weaker feminist attitudes while females have stronger feminist attitudes. The results of TMF show that females ($\bar{x}=30.26; \sigma=7.99$) score higher in traditional gender roles compared to males ($\bar{x}=13.22; \sigma=7.08$) which shows that they conform to the traditional gender role of males being masculine and females being feminine. This study yielded similar results as Toller et.al.(2004)^[23] in which highly masculine men are hesitant to consider themselves feminists although no significant correlations between TMF and FEM emerged. However, the mean scores show the differences. Women's support for feminism has not been found to be related to femininity in this study which is also consistent with the

findings of Jackson et al. (1996)^[24] and Twenge (1999)^[25]. Several works also found similar patterns for men (Burn et al., 2000)^[26].

The results of the RDAS also shows that males (\bar{x} =16.24; σ =2.21) score higher in Satisfaction subscale than females (\bar{x} =15.69; σ =2.29). Our findings are supported by Schumm et.al, (1998)^[27] indicating that wives, on average, reported lower marital satisfaction than husbands.

Table 4: The results of the multiple regression analyses for the prediction of Consensus, Satisfaction and Cohesion sub-scales of RDAS from demographic variables.

Criterion	Predictors	R	R ²	Beta
Consensus of RDAS	DoM	.25	.06	-.25**
	DoM	.28	.08	-.24**
	Fly size			.14*
Satisfaction of RDAS	Age	.21	.05	.21**
	Age	.28	.08	.20**
	MI			.19**
	Age	.33	.11	.46**
	MI			.19**
	DoM			-.31**
	Age	.36	.13	.43**
	MI			.24**
	DoM			-.38**
Cohesion of RDAS	Fly type			.18**
	MI	.15	.02	.15*
	MI	.21	.05	.15*
	SI			.15*

* is Significant at .01 level;

is Significant at .05 level

Demographic Variables: Age; No. of Children; DoM=Duration of Marriage; MI=Monthly Income; SI=Social Involvement; Family size=Fly size; Family type=Fly type; Religious Involvement=RI; No. of Bread earners=NoB; Educational Qualification=EQ }

Results (Table 4) shows the stepwise multiple regression which reveals that the increase in age, monthly income, family type, family size and social involvement significantly predicted increase on the indicators of positive marital adjustment. In addition, increase in duration of marriage is a significant predictor of lower satisfaction and consensus in marital adjustment.

The finding that increasing duration of marriage predicting decreasing consensus and satisfaction in marital relationship find supportive evidences from the extant of literature. Our finding contradicts earlier researches that indicated that duration of marriage is positively associated with marital satisfaction (Bali et al., 2010; Bookwala et al., 2005; Brown & Lin, 2012; Darvizeh & Kahaki, 2008)^[27-31] but agrees with findings by Jansen et al. (2006)^[32] in which satisfaction is lower in long-term marriages than in those of short duration.

In terms of the effect of income on marital satisfaction, high income individuals were more satisfied than those of the low income. The finding that increase in monthly income predicting to increase in satisfaction and cohesion support

other research by Pimentel (2000)^[33] and Trudel (2002)^[34] on income as one of the demographic factors that affect marital satisfaction.

Increase in family size or number of children predicting increase in consensus in our finding is also consistent with studies by Twenge et al. (2003)^[35] and Onyishi et al. (2012)^[36].

Bowman and Spanier (1978)^[37] and Burgess, et al. (1971)^[38] reported that people who married very young had poor marital adjustment than those who married at later age. In addition, other researchers (Boykin, 2004; Ji & Norling, 2004; Kurdek, 1991; Levine & Hennessey, 1990; Linda & Beard, 1986)^[39-43] showed that people who marry later in their lives are more likely to have higher marital quality, stability, satisfaction, and adjustment than those who were married at a younger age supports our result indicating that increase in age predicts increase on satisfaction.

Sabre (2014)^[44] found that women belonging to nuclear families revealed increased adjustment and satisfaction than those of joint families which is consistent with our finding and furthermore, our result revealed that men also show the same pattern as women.

In some, the finding of the study deserves consideration of socialization of gender, Masculinity-Feminity and the role of husband and wife in marital relationship in the Mizo society. The developing acceptance of positive feminist theory, the collaborative role of husband and wife in establishing a family with children as well as the role of closed knit community structure of the Mizo society for married couples deserves further exploration.

Conclusion

The findings in our study reveals that there are gender differences in FEM, TMF and Satisfaction subscale in RDAS though there is no significant correlations between the three psychological tools.. The increase in age, monthly income, family type, family size and social involvement significantly predicted increase on the indicators of positive marital adjustment. Significantly, the increasing duration of marriage predicted decreasing level of consensus (decision-making, values and affection) and lower satisfaction.

The limitations of this research should be noted. Firstly, the sample only included a small number of couples in Aizawl and the results cannot be generalized to the rest of the population. Since the sample was a convenience sample, it may not be representative of the whole Mizo population. Secondly, there is only a small amount of studies done on feminism, gender roles and marital adjustment for empirical research to compare this study in Mizo context. Further studies are required to throw some light for future use.

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