

## Research Report

# MARITAL ADJUSTMENT IN PATIENTS WITH EMOTIONALLY UNSTABLE PERSONALITY DISORDER

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Personality disorders, especially Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder (EUPD) may lead to significant marital discord. Though the incidence of separation and divorce are on the rise, the problems of underlying personality factors are not given much significance and are adequately studied. Among the personality disorders, the emotionally unstable personality disorder is the one that is more likely to be associated with marital discord and separation.

**Objective:** To study the marital adjustments of patients with the emotionally unstable personality disorder

**Methodology:** A cross-sectional study was done in individuals between 18 and 45 years and diagnosed as having Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder as per International Classification of Diseases-Diagnostic Criteria for Research (ICD 10-DCR) criteria, currently staying with their spouse, and attending a psychiatry department during the study period. Locke Wallace marital adjustment test (MAT) was the primary instrument used for the study. The Chi-square test was used to compare the relevant variables.

**Results:** 35 % of the sample (n= 34) Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder subjects reported significant marital dissatisfaction. Comorbid psychiatric disorders were seen in 23.5% of the sample. Association between the type of marriage and marital adjustment was found to be significant. 41.2% received some psychosocial intervention. 70.6% of the spouses had a history of substance use, and 23.5 % had a history of psychiatric illness. No significant difference in MAT severity was found between EUPD subtypes.

**Conclusion:** The study found a high level of marital maladjustment among subjects with Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder.

**Keywords:** marital dissatisfaction, Emotionally unstable personality disorder, marital adjustment, Borderline Personality Disorder.

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## INTRODUCTION

Personality disorders are defined as “an enduring pattern of inner experience and behaviour that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual’s culture, is pervasive and inflexible, has an onset in adolescence or early adulthood, is stable over time and leads to distress or impairment.<sup>1</sup> ICD-10 also has similar definition and nomenclature, except for borderline personality disorder, which ICD names as emotionally unstable personality disorder (EUPD).<sup>2</sup>

EUPD is a personality disorder in which “there is a marked tendency to act impulsively without consideration of the consequences and also has affective instability”. ICD-10 has divided it into impulsive and borderline subtypes.<sup>2</sup>

Marriage is a social institution. An intact and harmonious marital relationship is required for maintaining the family as a unit. However, as in any other relationships, conflicts often arise due to several reasons. Unlike the breakdown in other relationships, a marital breakdown or disharmony has a lot of negative implications on the individuals, especially the children. Personality disorders, especially EUPD, plays a significant role in marital disharmony.<sup>3</sup> The link between personality characteristics and marital satisfaction has been explored in previous studies also.<sup>4,5</sup> Batra et al. reported a high rate of unstable emotionality among females of divorce seeking couples compared to normal healthy controls.<sup>6</sup> A lower social adjustment was seen among subjects with EUPD.<sup>7</sup> A prospective study involving 142 late adolescent females reported an association between EUPD and dysfunction in romantic relationships.<sup>8</sup> Those with EUPD are more likely to be involved in romantic relationships

but found to experience unstable, chaotic and less prolonged relationships.<sup>9,10</sup> EUPD has been found to be associated with a low quality of intimate relationships and predispose to dysfunctional interactive behaviours and a negative marital outcome.<sup>11,12</sup> Though the incidence of separation and divorce are on the rise, the problems of underlying personality factors are not given much significance and not adequately studied.

## OBJECTIVES

To study the marital adjustment of patients with emotionally unstable personality disorder.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out among patients who attended the psychiatry department in a tertiary care centre (Govt. medical college, Kozhikode) in Kerala, India. Individuals in the age range of 18-45 years and diagnosed as having emotionally unstable personality disorder (EUPD) as per International Classification of Diseases-Diagnostic Criteria for Research (ICD 10-DCR)<sup>13</sup> criteria and currently staying with the spouse were included in this study. All consecutive EUPD patients of both genders attending psychiatry department during the study period (2012-2013) were included in the study. Those with mental retardation, seizure disorder, psychotic illness before 18 years of age and acute medical illness that interfere with assessment were excluded. After obtaining informed written consent, socio-demographic and clinical details were collected using a data sheet designed for this purpose. Data was collected from both patients with EUPD and their spouses. Diagnoses were made by a psychiatrist using ICD-10-DCR.

Locke Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (MAT) was administered for self-rating by the subjects.<sup>14</sup> This is a 15-item scale to assess marital satisfaction. Total score ranges from 2 to 158. Scores below 85 indicate poor marital satisfaction, and between 85 and 99 indicate moderate satisfaction. A score above 100 indicates high marital satisfaction. Malayalam version of the tool was finalised using forward and backward translation method.

Type of marriage (arranged/love) was decided based on the report from the couple.

The qualitative variables were summarised as frequencies and percentages. Differences in the family and spousal characteristics between those with low and high MAT score were compared using the chi-square test. A p-value of 0.05 or less was considered statistically significant. The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee, Government Medical College, Kozhikode.

## RESULTS

Thirty-four subjects diagnosed with EUPD comprised the study sample. Thirty (88.2%) were below 35 years of age. Three (8.8%) had a family history of mental illness. None of the subjects reported any past mental illness. 91.2% (n=31) of the group were in their first marriage. The average duration of the current marriage was less than ten years in 91.2% of the study group. Eight (23.5%) had no children, and 18 (52%) had children below 5 years of age. Fourteen (41.2%) subjects received some psychosocial intervention for marital discord in the past. 70.6% of spouses (all were males, subjects reported a moderate to high level of marital dissatisfaction. Comorbid psychiatric diagnoses were present in 8 (23.5%) of the

study subjects. Majority of spouses (97.1%) of the subjects had an education up to secondary level or above. Only 4 (11.8%) of spouses were below 25 years of age, and 53% were skilled workers or professionals. No significant difference in MAT severity was found between impulsive and borderline subgroups

**Table1: Socio-demographic characteristics of EUPD patients**

Characteristics		Number (%)
Age group	<25years	5 (14.7)
	25 -35years	25 (73.5)
	36- 45years	4 (11.8)
Gender	Male	6 (17.6)
	Female	28 (82.4)
Residence	Rural	21(61.8)
	Urban	13 (38.2)
Education	Primary	1(2.9)
	Secondary/higher	17(50)
	Graduate	15(44.1)
	Professional	1(2.9)
Occupation	Unemployed	14 (41.2)
	Unskilled	6 (17.6)
	Skilled	11(32.4)
	Professional	3 (8.8)
Income/ month	< Rs5000/-	4(11.8)
	5000-10000/-	21 (61.8)
	>10000/-	9(26.5)

## DISCUSSION

Women subjects predominated the study sample. A similar observation was made by Paris J, where the majority (80%) of BPD subjects receiving therapy were females

Table 2: Family characteristics, marital history and MAT severity

Parameters		MAT severity (number, %)		P value
		Low/Moderate	high	
Family type	Nuclear	14(60.9)	9(39.1)	0.196
	Joint	7 (87.5)	1(12.5)	
	Extended nuclear	1(33.3)	2(66.7)	
Family h/o mental illness	Yes	3(100)	0	0.180
	No	19(61.3)	12(35.3)	
Previous marriage	Yes	3(100)	0	0.180
	No	19(61.3)	12(35.3)	
Duration of marriage	<5years	11(64.7)	6(35.3)	0.997
	5-10 years	9(64.3)	5(35.7)	
	>10years	2(66.7)	1(33.3)	
Type of marriage	Arranged	19(76.0)	6(24)	0.022*
	Love marriage	3(33.3)	6(66.7)	

\*significant

compared to a community sample.<sup>15</sup> This could be because more women than men tend to report to a clinical setting for mental health issues. This study showed a high prevalence of marital maladjustment among people with EUPD. This agrees with many previous studies that noticed a high rate of marital distress and disruptions among EUPD subjects.<sup>3,5,13,16</sup> Gender, education, occupation, religion or socio-economic factors did not show any relationship with the severity of the marital adjustment. This could mean that borderline personality is a more important determinant of marital satisfaction than other socio-demographic variables. Though no statistical relationship was found between age group and marital adjustment, lower age group tend to report a high rate of marital dissatisfaction. However, this finding needs further exploration as the sample size was small. EUPD individuals with a history of love marriage reported a high rate of marital maladjustment compared to those with an arranged marriage. This association between the type of marriage and marital adjustment

was found to be statistically significant. This may reflect the tendency of EUPD subjects to have affective instability and impulsivity. Many previous studies reported a similar observation.<sup>9-13</sup> Whisman et al. also reported a positive association between the severity of EUPD and marital distress.<sup>16</sup>

We have used ICD-10 criteria which brings objectivity. Locke Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale is an appropriate tool designed for marital adjustment issues. Sample size calculation was not done, but all consecutive cases fulfilling the inclusion criteria during the study period were included. The study is cross-sectional and descriptive without a comparison group. Hence confounding variables were not controlled. In-depth studies are required to shed light on how persons with EUPD and their spouses cope with intimate relationships like marriage. Since most of the spouses had substance use, this could have influenced the quality of marital relationship; more studies are required to explore this area.

Table 3. Spousal characteristics and MAT severity.

Parameters		MAT severity (number, %)		P value
		Low/Moderate	high	
Age of the spouse	<25years	2(50)	2(50)	0.052
	26-35years	10(50)	10(50)	
	36-45	9(100)	0	
	>45	1(100)	0	
Education	Primary	1(100)	0	0.304
	Secondary	11(57.9)	8(42.1)	
	Graduates	9(81.8)	2(18.2)	
	Others	1(33.3)	2(66.7)	
Occupation	Unemployed	1(33.3)	6(46.2)	0.305
	Unskilled	7(53.8)	3(27.3)	
	Skilled	8(72.7)	1(14.3)	
	Professional	6(85.7)	2(66.7)	
Substance abuse	Yes	9(90)	1(10)	0.046*
	No	13(54.2)	11(45.8)	
H/o mental illness	Yes	1(100)	0	0.453
	No	21(63.6)	12(36.4)	

\*significant

## CONCLUSION

This study found a high level of marital maladjustment among subjects with Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder.

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