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**Marital Disharmony
among Working Couples
in Urban India – A
Sociological Inquiry**

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MARITAL DISHARMONY AMONG WORKING COUPLES IN URBAN INDIA – A SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Shiju Joseph* and Anand Inbanathan**

Abstract

The culturally diverse Indian society has undergone far-reaching changes in its social fabric, altering gender role linked beliefs and attitudes regarding family. In this light, the paper seeks to examine the inevitable disagreements among urban married couples while shouldering the duties of marriage/home and ambitious careers, leading to highly stressful lives. Specifically, the present paper explores the propensity among dual career couples to express their disagreements openly to each other, and the issues that trigger such arguments. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data regarding the frequency of arguments on specified areas affecting marriage. The analysis of 238 marriages in Bangalore city reveals that financial concerns, sharing household responsibilities, management of time, parenting, relationship with in-laws, and habits and addictions turned out to be common triggers of marital arguments among dual career couples. We also note that both duration and quality of marriage were inversely related to frequency of arguments.

Background

The recent trends of urbanisation have impacted the conventional notions of roles and responsibilities in families. Improved opportunities of education for women and their subsequent entry into formal occupations as professionals have explicitly altered the traditional role expectations and the structure of families. In recent years, the unprecedented burden of taking on the highly contending spheres of both home and work is causing tangible stress on the couples (Ochsner, 2012). The interface between work and home is noticeable, especially for dual career couples, owing to the high commitment and responsibility that each of these domains entails (Lewis & Cooper, 1987). The role expectations of these two domains are generally not compatible, causing conflict and a constant negotiation between family and work life roles (Netemeyer *et al*, 1996).

Inasmuch as marriage is one of the most basic forms of interpersonal social relationship, so are disagreements, which are unavoidable in these kinds of intimate relationships. In fact, conflict in intimate human relationships, such as marriage, is inevitable (Canary *et al*, 1995). Negative interactions and behaviour within the marital dyad is a natural outcome of communication and sharing lives together. However, a mere presence of these disagreements does not necessarily imply or lead to marital disruption. In fact, even in highly successful long-term marriages, disagreements may be a part and parcel of the relationship itself. In this regard, marital satisfaction does not necessarily reflect the absence of any conflict, but rather a relatively higher level of positive behaviour compared to negative ones (Fincham, 2003). Studies have shown that a happy, stable marriage lies in the couple's ability to express disagreements and resolve conflicts using deliberate peace-making mechanisms. Though in some cases, presence of conflicts led to strengthening of the marital relationship (Kriesberg, 1998), the

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negative effect of arguments and the absence of proper conflict management can contribute to tensions in the marital relationship (Fincham & Beach, 1999; Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013).

Marital conflict is not a result of one aspect of the marital dyad but can occur due to a variety of factors. Societal processes also contribute to conflict owing to differences in caste, cultural traditions, expectations, and ascribed meanings. Studies on work-family conflict and marital conflict have been generally located in the Western/US context. Though the importance of this phenomenon in other cultures is recognised in the literature, research studies on these phenomena have been relatively few (Kalliath, *et al*, 2011). In this context, the paper attempts to explore marital disagreements among career-oriented couples in the Indian urban context. Frequency of negative interactions, commonly referred to as arguments, was investigated in relation to the quality of marital relationships.

The paper is organised into six sections. The background of the paper describing the context of marital disagreements is followed by a brief overview on understanding the concept of dual career couples. The concept of marital conflict as understood in the Indian context is briefly discussed in the third section of the paper and the factors that influence such conflict are covered in the next section. The fifth section provides the data, sampling method, details on respondents of the study and methodology of analysis followed in arriving at the key findings. Using culturally relevant variables, the sixth section analyses the frequency of arguments across different themes among the marital dyad. Some background factors influencing marital conflict explored through a regression framework are presented next. The last section discusses the key findings and draws conclusions from the study.

Dual Career Couples

The term "dual career" was first used by Rapoport and Rapoport in 1969, and in general, dual career couples are defined as two people in a committed relationship each with a career (Neault & Pickerell, 2005). Dual career couples are those where "both partners pursue an occupational career occupying which are characterised by high professional standards, a high degree of commitment and a developmental sequence" (Rusconi, 2002). The dual earner couples are also referred to as dual-worker, two-pay cheque, or two-person career families. Even as Indian society is getting used to this idea of a dual career family, the independent career focus of each partner in the dual career marriage presents newer challenges: Partners in marriage who give career equal, if not more, importance compared to their marriage relationship. The patriarchal cultural landscape ensures that such a scenario emerges primarily when the women begin to think about their own careers since it is considered normal, maybe even mandatory, for an urban man to pursue a career.

There is no doubt that greater education and career focus of women have brought about greater financial autonomy and a sense of power for women. This is also evident in the delay in age at marriage, and age at first birth. However, in aspects such as decision making, division of household labour, and perceptions of marital equality, gender role attitudes seem to prevail. For instance, it is common for women to take decisions on matters concerning everyday affairs and for men to take the more significant decisions for the family (Fox & Murry, 2000). Recent additions in the literature suggest that women in dual career families are beginning to have opportunities to be a collaborative partner, indicative of a movement towards equality (Bartley *et al*, 2005).

Thus, the specific context– social and economic– of dual career married couples poses challenges different from those faced by other couples. The spread of well-paid employment for women has created a social space which has transformed the way concepts like family, marriage, breadwinner, work, etc. were understood traditionally. The role overload that comes with minding a career and a family brings with it pressure and stress unknown hitherto. A casualty in this development is often the quality of marital relationship. Though not a new area of study in the Western world, the Indian family themes have paid relatively less attention to examining marital conflict among dual career couples.

Conflict in Marital Relationship in India

By and large, conflict in a relationship consists of negative behaviour and interactions that cause strain in the quality of the relationship. Marital conflict refers to covert/overt interaction between spouses that is identified by the spouses as disagreement or a source of difficulty in the relationship. Couples may complain about sources of conflict ranging from verbal and physical abuse to personal characteristics and behaviour. The present section focuses on discussing the concept of marital conflict with reference to Indian society.

To put it briefly, the dual career format seeks to integrate the demands of two full-time careers with family responsibilities. The conflict arising over power is a strong predictor of marital dissatisfaction (Kurdek, 1994). Power is an integral part of any relationship, especially close romantic relationships, because it determines how the partners relate to each other and how decisions are made. The relative economic independence accorded by a career can embolden the woman to consider herself powerful to some extent. Conversely, husbands too face the prospect of sharing the power that they traditionally held. “Individuals display more dominance when they perceive they are relatively equal in power to their partners than when they perceive they have more or less power than their partner” (Dunbar *et al*, 2008: 15).

A study by Madhavi and Vimala (2011) on 500 women software professionals in Chennai found that women in the age group of 25-35 years had more work-family issues than other age groups. Clark and Sekher (2007) discovered that young IT women professionals in Bangalore's high-tech sector were willing to focus on developing satisfying careers while primarily seeking support from parents in working against the traditional norms the society presented. These women also were expecting favourable in-laws and high partner support through negotiations and deference to customs suggesting the greater expectations that these career-focused women held about their family life.

The literature has shown that childcare is one of the most important areas of conflict among married partners (Sudarshan & Bhattacharya, 2009; Madhavi and Vimala, 2011). Despite the changes that are happening in the family sphere with regard to the roles, the 'responsibility' for the regular care of the child seems to rest with the wife. A large-scale survey in Delhi (Sudarshan & Bhattacharya, 2009) indicated that there was a sudden increase in household duties as a result of marriage and, additionally, of childbirth. Marital problems due to a 'working wife' were reported by respondents to be a relatively common occurrence. Kalliath *et al* (2011) interviewed 21 dual earner couples who were all in full-time employment to find that more men than women considered work to be their first priority, whereas for

women, both the domains were important and they “considered their family to be deserving of time and attention” (47).

Though less explored, the importance of extended family in the life of an individual/couple cannot be overstated in India. One needs to fulfil the requirements of not only the spouse, but also his/her parents and family including household work and childcare. Similar to familial context, there are a number of cultural contexts, like friends and religion. All of these play important roles in triggering or abetting, or/and preventing or resolving the conflicts. A study in the Indian context found that, “belief in God, attitude to life, strength obtained from helping others and support from colleagues and family” (Kalliath *et al*, 2011; 47) were helpful factors in coping with the strains. Thus, in the context of India, which is a collectivistic society, the societal processes and structures are especially significant while exploring the marital relationship.

Factors Influencing Marital Conflict

As the traditional expectations of marriage have undergone quite a change, the professional work pressures and demands on the home front have brought about greater strains to the marital dyad. Considerable literature and lived experiences of many a couple stand testimony to the fact of disagreements and differences that either blow up into crises in a relationship or get resolved and thus deepen the relationship (Canary *et al*, 1995; Fincham, 2003). The imperatives of a career-driven life and the norms of a marital relationship in the context of a collectivistic society are not easily reconciled (Kalliath, *et al*, 2011). This uneasy relationship could easily put the couple in the unenviable position of having to juggle the demands of both a career and a marriage. This section discusses some of the common factors that induce conflict in a marital relationship.

Duration of Marriage

Studies have found that marital disagreements and conflict decline as the length of marriage increases (Levenson *et al*, 1993). Long-term marriages may make the couple more tolerant of each other or help them come to a greater understanding of what each one wants thus leading to fewer disagreements (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Younger couples may have more conflicts because of the pressure of ensuring financial stability for their future as a family (Mirowski & Ross, 1999). Decisions about finance, investments and expenditure patterns may lead to worries about the future and thus provide sufficient cause for arguments.

Marital Quality

Marital quality is the key concept explaining the happiness of a marriage. As societies undergo modernisation, adults also appear to be less socially oriented, show less compliance with social expectations and role imperatives, and also become more individually orientated (Wong & Goodwin, 2009), leading to greater differences between the couples. Therefore, conflicts among dual career couples are negatively associated with the overall level of satisfaction and quality of marriage (Steffy & Ashbaugh, 1986).

Time-Related Stress

A major challenge reported by both men and women in dual career marriages is time management (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). This is directly related to the amount of time one is away from home for work, including the travel time to the workplace. This tells us the amount of time one is physically away from home. However, time-related stress is also related to the unavailability of the respondent to his/her spouse even when physically present at home.

Children

Another determinant of marital quality and a cause of arguments is the presence of children. Generally, children are associated with lower marital quality (Bradbury *et al*, 2000). Couples who have children, especially younger ones, are known to have greater strain in their marital life. Higher marital disagreements have been reported among the couples with younger children (Bradbury & Karney, 1993). It could be because it requires the spouses to engage more frequently in communication with regard to the requirements of raising a child (Anderson *et al*, 1983). Barnett and Baruch (1985) explained that motherhood led to both role overload and role conflict, especially for women.

Type of Family

Type of family (whether parents/in-laws stay with the couple or not) and whether the couple had a love or arranged marriage have also been included in the analysis. It is possible that the family of origin was a source of solace to the wife in a typically traditionally arranged marriage, especially during a strain in the relationship between husband and wife due to any conflict with the affinal kin (Srinivas, 1999: 141-143). Given the fact that societal expectations, traditions, stereotypes and the influence of one's extended family are considerable in India, the social dimension of such adjustment cannot be ignored.

Type of Marriage

Most marriages in India are 'arranged', despite reports that self-choice marriages are increasing in number. Women interpreted the practice of arranged marriage as another form of self-determination where one is not constrained by feelings and thus can exercise more choice in the selection of suitable partners (Sharangpani, 2010). Thus, the satisfaction that a couple derive from marriage can be greatly influenced by the strategy used for mate selection and whether the extended family acts as an active support system.

Data and Methodology

The paper seeks to examine the nature of marital disagreements among dual-career couples. For this purpose, self-administered close-ended questionnaires were administered to the working professionals who gave their opinion on different aspects of their marital life. The analysis relies on data collected from 238 dual career marriages in the city of Bangalore. The respondents were married professionals (male or female), residing in urban areas of Bangalore along with their spouses who were also actively pursuing a career. Given the sensitive nature of the study, respondents were contacted using a

combination of convenient sampling and snowball sampling. Though such a study would benefit from data collected with dyads as unit of analysis, considering the sensitive nature of such studies on the intimate lives of people, it was decided to study every case as a separate marriage. However, it was ensured that the respondent and his/her partner were into full-time careers. All the respondents were professionals married to spouses who, in their opinion, also had a definite career focus.

Based on the survey of literature and a pilot study involving 25 married professionals, the most common areas of disagreement among couples were arrived at, also keeping in mind the cultural context of Indian society, which is diverse and has familial networks which are relatively strong. The areas of disagreements identified were parenting, finance, household work, relationship with relatives, relationship with friends/colleagues, religious beliefs/practices, habits/addictions, and lack of time for each other. Each of these key areas will be discussed during the discussion of results. The respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they argued with each other on each topic and the response categories ranged from 1 (almost daily) to 5 (never). For the purpose of the descriptive analysis, the responses were recoded into three categories such as Daily/Often, Sometimes/Rarely and Never. A linear regression was used to arrive at the importance of each of the factors influencing the frequency of marital arguments. The questionnaire also included a section on basic details of the respondent and his/her spouse, amount of time spent away from home for the purposes of work and the extent of bringing work home after office hours to capture the work dimensions as well.

A scale designed by Shah (1991) specifically for India was used to assess the quality of the respondent's marriage. It must be kept in mind that the study uses only one partner's views/perception though the questions in the scale cover the attitudes and behavior of both partners. A Marital Quality Score is used in the present study to examine its relationship to the frequency of arguments.

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the background profile of the respondents of the sample survey conducted in 2012-13. The sample consisted of 238 married professionals (104 males and 134 females). Most of the marriages in the sample were arranged (76.4%). A significant number of respondents belonged to the teaching/research positions (38.7%) while a considerable number also belonged to the banking (23.5%) and IT sectors (13.9%). A majority of the respondents reported they were in nuclear families (61.8%). About 87 per cent had children and amongst these, most had only one child.

Table 1: Basic Profile of the Respondents

Variable	Categories	Total
Education	Bachelors	42 (18.7)
	Bachelors. Prof	77 (34.2)
	Masters	45 (20.0)
	Masters. Prof	49 (21.8)
	M. Phil /PhD/ MD/ CA	12 (5.3)
Profession	Government Service	16 (6.7)
	IT, ITES	33 (13.9)
	Banking	56 (23.5)
	Medical Professional	7 (2.9)
	Teaching/ Research	92 (38.7)
	Self-employed Business	14 (5.9)
	Other	20 (8.4)
Type of marriage	Arranged Marriage	181 (76.4)
	Love marriage	56 (23.6)
Family Structure	Nuclear	147 (61.8)
	Extended/Joint	91 (38.2)
Children	Presence of Children	205 (86.9)
Duration of marriage	No. of Years (Mean)	12.9

Source: Sample Survey (2012-13)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Analysis on Disagreement in Marital Relationship

In the case of dual career couples, both the expectations and stakes are higher and the stress can lead to problems altering the quality of their relationship. Negotiating household tasks, being responsible for the child, contributing financially, and meeting the cultural expectations seem to bring some amount of strain to these couples, especially women. In this regard, it is worthwhile to examine the most common areas of disagreements among the career-focused couples in an urban context. For this purpose, the respondents were presented with eight crucial areas of possible disagreements with their spouses in their daily life and were asked to indicate how frequently they argued with each other on each of these areas. The results are discussed in detail in the following section.

Parenting

Literature has mixed views on the effect of children on marital relationship. While children can bring stability to marriages (Thornton, 1977), some scholars are of the opinion that children lead to marital disruption (Campbell *et al*, 1976; Cherlin, 1977; Svarer & Verner, 2008). Cherlin (1977) explained that caring for young children involved costs and this could impose a strain on the marital relationship. While adjusting to parental responsibilities, the couple may lose their sense of intimacy and experience greater conflict due to lack of proper communication (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013). Given that children

can be both a source of conflict and a solace for marital partners, the survey considered the topic of bringing up children to find out how often the couples had disagreements due to their parental responsibilities. Table 2 presents the results of the same as reported by the respondents on the topic of bringing up children. This variable takes into account only those who had children. Hence, only 205 respondents are considered for analysing parenting as a source of conflict among career couples.

Table 2: Parenting as a Source of Conflict

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Bringing up children	Sometimes/ Rarely	44 (64.7)	67 (67.0)	111 (66.1)
	Daily/Often	24 (35.3)	33 (33.0)	57 (33.9)
	Total	68 (100)	100 (100)	168 (100)

Source: Sample Survey (2012-13)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

In all, one-fourth of the respondents who had children had marital conflicts centered around parenting on a regular basis. The results of the survey indicate that one in three marriages is troubled by frequent arguments on issues related to children. Around 35.3 per cent of males and 25.6 per cent of females reported having disagreements with regard to parental responsibilities on a daily basis. It is crucial to note there that women seem to face greater stress over parenting owing to their primary role of caregiver. In this regard, it would be safe to say that children may also add to the existing stress of the dual career couple as parenting requires additional time and care almost constantly (Neault & Pickerell, 2005). Unlike other societies, Indian working couples tend to depend on maids, nannies and close relatives to cope with the challenges of parenting. Most often the dual career couples have their parents or in-laws to support them with childcare as dependency on institutional child care is relatively less common in India.

Financial Matters

Various studies have reported money as one the most frequent sources of spousal conflict (Oggins, 2003; Chethik, 2006). Tichenor (1999) stressed that discussing matters related to finance was a very emotional issue and could trigger defensiveness among marital partners as it was closely related to feelings of self-worth and also a sense of vulnerability. In a study of 100 husbands' and 100 wives' diary reports of 748 conflict instances, Papp *et al* (2009) found that marital conflicts about money were long-lasting, problematic, and recurrent, and at times even did not have a resolution in comparison to non-monetary issues. Bertrand *et al* (2013) found that couples were more likely to divorce when women earned more than their husbands. Since labour force participation of women in a full-time career is a relatively new phenomenon, it could either lead to positive responses from the male partner or create anxiety among the marital dyad (Malec, 2015). In this regard, the study sought to investigate how frequently money was an issue of contention in the marriages of the respondents.

Table 3: Financial Matters as a Source of Conflict

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Finance	Never	28 (26.9)	26 (19.4)	54 (22.7)
	Sometimes/ Rarely	51 (49.0)	76 (56.7)	127 (53.4)
	Daily/Often	25 (24.0)	32 (23.9)	57 (23.9)

Source: Sample Survey (2012-13)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Dual career couples are synonymous with dual incomes. Despite higher incomes collectively as a couple, the survey results have shown that almost equal percentages of men and women (23.9 per cent) admitted to arguing often or daily regarding money matters. Around 49 per cent of males and 57 per cent of females reported that they argued only sometimes on financial issues. Overall, more females reported having disagreements often than males regarding finance though the general understanding is that men expect greater control over financial matters and so cause more disagreements than women (Tichneur, 1999; Dew & Dakin, 2011).

Household Work

Managing household responsibilities is a great challenge for dual career couples. With intense working hours and high demands of productivity at the workplace, most couples find it challenging to balance this aspect. This is more so for females, who assume the traditional role of caregiver and also have to manage her new-found status as a career woman. Sharing of household work has been investigated in quite a diverse manner across societies. Amongst factors that impact division of household work, gender ideology, availability of time, and other resources are crucial (Killewald & Gough, 2010). Dew and Dakin (2011) found that disagreements over housework also predicted conflict tactics about as strongly as financial disagreements based on data from a national survey of families with 3,961 couples. When provisions for parental leave were available, it reduced conflicts over household division of labour leading to more equal sharing of housework in the long run (Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2011).

Table 4: Household Work as a Source of Conflict

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Household work	Never	36 (34.6)	29 (21.6)	65 (27.3)
	Sometimes/ Rarely	39 (37.5)	72 (53.7)	111 (46.6)
	Daily/Often	29 (27.9)	33 (24.6)	62 (26.1)

Source: Sample Survey (2012-13)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

As seen in Table 4, household work is an area that triggers argument for around 26.1 per cent of the couples on a daily basis. Daily arguments regarding household chores tend to be repetitive, stressful and in the long run, significantly frustrating for the couple (Harper *et al*, 2000). It is important to note that a good number of husbands have no qualms in accepting that their marriages do involve

arguments regarding household work. Around 37 per cent of the males felt that they sometimes fought over this issue. Ruppner (2012) points out that greater housework conflict is reported by both men and women in cases where women are in full-time employment. Further, the presence of children in the family also correlates with relatively high levels of reported housework (Davis & Greenstein, 2004).

Relationships with Relatives

Collectivist cultures, like India, place a great deal of importance on the acceptance of the marriage relationship by the extended family. Ahmadi *et al* (2015) reason that the extended family, especially the parents-in-law, play an important role in the life of married couples, particularly in collectivist cultures. Burger and Milardo (1995) explain that the bigger the size of the wife's extended family, the greater is the conflicts in marriage.

Table 5: Relationship with Relatives as a Source of Conflict

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Relationship with Relatives	Never	43 (41.3)	37 (27.6)	80 (33.6)
	Sometimes/ Rarely	40 (38.5)	70 (52.2)	110 (46.2)
	Daily/Often	21 (20.2)	27 (20.1)	48 (20.2)

Source: Sample Survey (2012-13)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

The importance of extended family cannot be overstated in the life of an Indian couple. Table 5 shows that an equal percentage (20%) of men and women reported having disagreements daily on issues regarding relatives. For instance, the interference of in-laws in the day-to-day affairs of the married couple or in their problems over sharing household work might trigger arguments between the couple. However, in total, more women (72.4%) reported disagreements compared to men (58.7%), regarding relationship with relatives. In some cases, parents and in-laws of the marital dyad could be a great source of support by assisting the couple in childcare and household work, or sometimes may add to the struggles of the couple by interfering in their relationship (Milardo *et al*, 1985).

Relationship with Friends/Colleagues

The proximity with which colleagues of both sexes interact in a work atmosphere and the kind of friends one may cultivate in his/her social circles can variously contribute to marital conflict. The role of friends and colleagues is ambivalent in the life of a dual career couple. They can be a source of conflict, the subject of the conflict, and an abetting factor, or they can participate in the resolution of the conflict. The manner in which friends and colleagues play a role in the conflict may vary by gender. It is worth mentioning here that discussing marital issues with friends can assist women in achieving better quality in their marriages, suggesting that the friend's role is one of support (Julien *et al*, 2000).

Table 6: Relationship with Friends/Colleagues as a Source of Conflict

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Relationship with Friends and Colleagues	Never	42 (40.4)	43 (32.1)	85 (35.7)
	Sometimes/ Rarely	40 (38.5)	65 (48.5)	105 (44.1)
	Daily/Often	22 (21.2)	26 (19.4)	48 (20.2)

Source: Sample Survey (2012-13)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Table 6 presents the results of the frequency of disagreements as reported by the respondents with regard to relationship with friends/colleagues. Almost an equal percentage of men and women reported arguing daily with regard to their relationship with friends or colleagues. Overall, 67.9 per cent of women and 59.6 percent of men reported arguments with their partners about friends. Findings from the existing literature indicate that women are more likely to discuss their marital issues with their friends than men (Oliker, 1989).

It is important to note that we did not specify the type of relationship with colleagues/friends in evaluating its role in triggering conflict in the marital dyad. The intention was to explore any kind of argument caused in the spousal relationship because of relationship with friends or colleagues at the workplace. This could range from discussing family issues with friends and giving priority to friends/colleagues over the spouse/family to suspected extramarital affairs with friends/colleagues. What we have in the data is the extent to which interacting with friends/colleagues becomes a cause of conflict in marriage.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

The role of cultural elements as expressed through religious beliefs, practices and respect for religious persons is significant in a traditional society. Religion can be a source of conflict and at the same time, a tonic to ease marital conflict for its believers. The fervour with which an individual believes in religious practices need not be shared by his/her partner in all cases. In this case, the difference can be a potential source of conflict (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). However, widespread use of religious coping mechanisms is reported among Indian dual earner couples (Kalliath *et al*, 2011) suggesting that a certain level of faith in God can reduce tensions regarding financial difficulties and keep the couple together in times of crisis.

Table 7: Religious Beliefs and Practices as a Source of Conflict

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Religious beliefs and Practices	Never	58 (55.8)	68 (50.7)	126 (52.9)
	Sometimes/ Rarely	27 (26)	46 (34.3)	73 (30.7)
	Daily/Often	19 (18.3)	20 (14.9)	39 (16.4)

Source: Sample Survey (2012-13)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

As seen in Table 7, 18.3 per cent of males and 15 per cent of females reported that they argued over the issue of religious beliefs and practices on a daily basis. Literature has shown that there are tensions when the couples' backgrounds are diverse, as in inter-cultural marriages, unless they have adapted to the other culture well. Religious practices/ceremonies are often occasions when married couples do certain procedures together, which may help in bonding. However, those in inter-religious marriages tend to either avoid the religious practices of both their religions or observe/perform their religious practices independently. In either case, they lose out on some opportunities in bonding that are available to the others. It is interesting to note that around 53 per cent of the respondents admitted to have never fought on the particular issue. It would be quite meaningful to say that in these cases, religiosity helps the couple in dealing with their fast-paced career-driven lives and thereby minimises the harmful effects of negative interactions (Larson, 1989; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006).

Habits/ Addictions

The increasing dependence on some behavior such as gambling, eating, exercise, work, internet, cell phone use, and sex come under the purview of addictions (Robinson, 1998; Griffiths, 2000). It is crucial to note that dual career couples, who have equally competing worlds, can resort to habits and addictions to relieve their stress. The spillover of stress can affect the quality of relationship between the couples. A study by Billings *et al* (1979) did not find a significant difference between the marital interactions of alcoholics and their wives from those of non-alcoholic married distressed couples. However, the drinking problems of parents have been seen as factors leading to higher couple conflicts and ineffective parenting (Keller *et al*, 2005). Besides alcohol, increased use of cell phones and internet are also seen to trigger arguments as they provide unhealthy attachment patterns and reinforce isolation behavior (Griffiths, 2000), leading to unsatisfying relationships.

Table 8: Habits/Addictions as a Source of Conflict

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Habits/ Addictions	Never	20 (19.2)	33 (24.6)	53 (22.3)
	Sometimes/ Rarely	63 (60.6)	69 (51.5)	132 (55.5)
	Daily/Often	21 (20.2)	32 (23.9)	53 (22.3)

Source: Sample Survey (2012-13)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Table 8 presents the results of the frequency of disagreements as reported by the respondents with regard to habits and addictions. By and large, habits/ addictions include alcoholism, spending time on social media, gambling, workaholism, smoking, watching TV, reading books, religious prayer or any kind of dependence on a hobby. It is important to note that the conflict-inducing habits/addictions may be of the spouse rather than of the respondent. Around 22.3 per cent of the respondents reported having no conflicts regarding any addiction, while a similar percentage of them reported fighting over the issue of habits and addictions frequently. A higher percentage (80.8%) of men reported having disagreements over habits/addiction behaviour than women (75.4%). Literature has also suggested that

alcoholic husbands are prone to more hostile marital interactions with their partners (Floyd *et al*, 2006). A relatively new development in addiction behaviour especially among dual career couples is the increasing workaholism or addiction to work, which is leading to changing dynamics in relationships (Robinson, 1998; Poitrowski & Vodanovich, 2006).

Lack of Time for Each Other

In the case of dual-career couples, the demands on time come directly from the competing worlds of career and home. Given the multiple roles and responsibilities, the married couples have to constantly negotiate to meet these contending demands. Time is one of the biggest challenges for dual career couples, be it spending time with their partner, or children, or others (Neault & Pickerell, 2005). The associated time pressures because of the demands placed at work and home make it difficult for these couples to maintain a sense of balance and composure in the long run.

Table 9: Lack of Time for Each Other as a Source of Conflict

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Lack of time for each other	Never	52 (50.0)	30 (22.4)	82 (34.5)
	Sometimes/ Rarely	33 (31.7)	71 (53.0)	104 (43.7)
	Daily/Often	19 (18.3)	33 (24.6)	52 (21.8)

Source: Sample Survey (2012-13)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Table 9 looks at the frequency of disagreements related to lack of time across gender in our sample. Around 53 per cent of the female respondents reported that they fought over lack of quality time with each other while only 31.7 per cent of males fought over the same issue. In our sample, 18.3 per cent of men and a higher percentage of women (24.6%) said they had frequent negative interactions due to lack of time for each other. On the whole, however, the data clearly show that wives face greater burden over lack of time than men. Women have expressed concern more than men about this problem in their busy lives (Cherpas, 1985). This is in line with the consensus in existing literature, which stresses the fact that the responsibility of home greatly lies with the woman, along with her career focus.

Frequency of Arguments

Marital conflict is a multi-dimensional concept as one factor cannot be singled out as the sole determinant. The conflict arises when egalitarian ideas conflict with the culturally predetermined traditional roles and expectations. The above discussion looked at the data on marital disagreements across areas from the perspective of male and female respondents reporting how frequently they argued with their spouses. The present section looks at the overall frequency of arguments as reported by the male and female respondents and are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Reported Degree of arguments among respondents

Variable	Categories	Male	Female	Total
Argument Score	Never	3 (2.9)	2 (1.6)	5 (2.2)
	Low	49 (47.6)	44 (34.1)	93 (40.1)
	Medium	30 (29.1)	56 (43.4)	86 (37.1)
	High	21 (20.4)	27 (20.9)	48 (20.7)

Source: Sample Survey (2012-13)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

It is interesting to note that almost an equal percentage of men (20.4%) and women (20.9%) reported having high levels of disagreements. However, overall, around 65 per cent of women reported medium to high level of disagreements while only 50 per cent of men reported similar levels affirming the fact that women tend to report more disagreements (Hoelter *et al*, 2004). Women seem to pursue a conflict or a conversation more than men, who are likely to withdraw from such negative marital interactions (Johnson, 1996). Only about 2.2 per cent of the respondents reported having never fought with each other, which may indicate that they are being reserved in disclosing details about their personal lives. Around 37.1 per cent of the respondents reported having a medium level of disagreements.

Relationship between Marital Quality and Disagreements

Most attention in research has been directed at exploring the role of 'positive' components of marital quality and their relationship to various dimensions of marriage. The 'negative' components of marital quality, usually associated with marital conflict, are not explored as much. Various studies have found significant association between marital dissatisfaction and conflict (Gottman, 1999; Ridley *et al*, 2001). Scholars have found that negative-affect reciprocity, i.e. a series of negative exchanges between the partners during conflicting situations, is an important factor influencing the quality of marriages (Gottman, 1999). An overall association between arguments and marital quality as reported by the respondents is presented in Table 11. A majority of respondents who reported high levels of marital disagreements tended to report poor marital quality. Those who reported that they never argued or had relatively fewer arguments experienced medium levels of marital satisfaction.

Table 11: Relationship between Marital Quality and Disagreements

Marital Quality	Frequency of Disagreements			
	Never	Low	Medium	High
High Quality	3 (60)	48 (51.6)	3 (3.5)	0 (0)
Medium Quality	2 (40)	37 (39.8)	64 (74.4)	12 (25)
Poor Quality	0 (0)	8 (8.6)	19 (22.1)	36 (75)

Source: Sample Survey (2012-13)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Determinants of Marital Disagreements

The study analysed the determinants of marital disagreements by employing a dummy variable linear regression model. Dummy variable models are useful when explanatory variables are qualitative in nature. A combined score of frequency of arguments on various topics was used as the dependent variable and dummy regressors included presence of children, type of marriage, and type of family. The other independent variables used to explain the frequency of disagreements between the couples are time-related stress, duration of marriage, and overall marital quality. Table 12 presents the results of the determinants of marital disagreements employed in a linear regression framework. The regression model has a good explanatory power of 57 per cent.

Table 12: Determinants of Marital Disagreements

Dependent Variable: Frequency of Arguments

Variables	Coefficient
Duration of Marriage	-0.04* (-1.65)
Marital Quality	-0.09*** (-12.00)
Time-related stress	0.41* (2.74)
Children:	
Yes	-0.78
No (Ref)	(-1.33)
Type of marriage:	
Arranged	-1.26***
Love (Ref)	(-2.36)
Type of family:	
Nuclear	-0.60
Joint (Ref)	(-1.43)
Constant	18.04* (14.14)
R square	0.57
F (6, 231) = 50.81	Prob> F = .0000

Note: * Significant at 1%, ** Significant at 5%

Figures in parentheses indicate t values

Considering marital duration as one of the determinants of frequency of arguments, the regression model showed that length of marriage had a negative coefficient of -0.04. As a couple stay married for more years, the frequency of disagreements reduces, at least in terms of their expression. This confirms the findings of other studies on marital disagreements. For instance, Allendorf and Ghimire (2013) found that each additional year of marriage was associated with 0.02 per cent lower disagreements.

Time-related strain was used to explain its influence on marital disagreements. The regression results showed that the coefficient value for time-based conflict was 0.41 and significant at 10 per cent. As time-related stress increases, it leads to more frequent disagreements between couples. Literature has provided evidence that explanations or attributions for negative marital events (e.g. partner comes home late from work) can increase the probability of conflict behaviour (Fincham & Beach, 1999). Dew and Dakin (2011) found that husbands' disagreement over the issue of not spending time with each other was a strong reason for physical violence. Quality of marriage was used as one of the independent variables to explain the frequency of arguments among career couples. The coefficient value of the same was -0.09 and highly significant at 1 per cent. As the quality of marriages improved, marital conflict weakened confirming the results of existing studies that conflict and levels of marital quality are negatively related (Steffy & Ashbaugh, 1986).

The reference dummy for type of marriage was love marriage. The negative coefficient value of -1.26 of arranged marriage shows that couples in love marriages tend to have more frequent disagreements than their counterparts. The literature on the importance of self-selection of spouse is relatively inconclusive. Self-selection marriages may start out with high levels of love and interaction, but tensions over lack of family support may reduce satisfaction and increase conflict over time (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013). But Hoelteret *et al* (2004) did not find higher levels of marital disagreements among those who chose their own spouse. The results point to a higher propensity to argue among couples who had self-choice marriages.

Another determinant of marital disagreement, the presence of children, seems to have a negative (-0.78), though not significant, influence on the frequency of arguments. The study used the absence of children as the reference category. Twengeet *et al* (2003) explained that children take away a substantial amount of time a couple give to each other and effect a change in their priorities, thus effectively distancing the couple from each other.

The regression model also sought to explain whether difference in type of family and marriage had any significant difference in explaining marital disagreements. The reference category for type of marriage was joint family. The coefficient value of -0.60 showed that there exists a negative, but insignificant relationship between a nuclear family and frequency of marital disagreements. Marital disagreements are reported to be higher among joint families. This is not surprising as the presence of in-laws has been shown in our previous analysis to affect the marital quality of the couples.

Amongst all the variables, duration of marriage and marital quality had a negative and significant relationship with marital disagreements. Also, those in self-choice marriages experienced greater frequency of disagreements than those in arranged marriages. It is worth noting that time-related stress is a positive and significant contributor to the frequency of arguments among these career-focused couples.

Conclusion

The main aim of this paper was to reflect on the issue of marital disagreements among dual career couples in India while managing their busy careers and stressful lives. Arguments are unavoidable in any intimate relationship. However, management and resolution of such conflicts may hold the key to satisfying relationships. Dual career couples, because of their specific focus on career, get insufficient time to devote to marriage. Therefore, it is crucial how they spend the limited time that they get to interact with each other. The study probed how often the respondent argued with the partner with regard to different dimensions that pertain to the lives of married couples in India. Descriptive analysis was used to examine the responses in revealing how often these areas become occasions for triggering conflicts.

A linear regression framework was employed to explain the reported frequency of disagreements between the couples. As expected, length of marriage and quality of marital relationship had a negative and significant association with disagreements. It would be important to state here that among several themes, lack of quality time due to increased work demands acts as an important factor influencing marital disagreements. Negotiating time on a regular basis in the context of negative spillovers of work and home can be quite a challenge for career couples.

In sum, the findings support the notion that for marital partners and career-focused individuals, experience of negative interactions or satisfaction in marital relationship rests on the perceptions of these individuals and how disagreements are resolved on a regular basis. The findings of the study regarding topics that consistently trigger negative interactions can throw light on stressful marriages.

Satisfaction in marital relationships may depend more strongly on the kind of frequent interactions between the married couples than the type of disagreements that are being addressed (Gottman, 1999). The strategies adopted by the couples in dealing with negative interactions were also probed as part of the overall study on marital adjustment, but this subject is beyond the scope of this paper. It is crucial to note that it is not the actual demands at the home front or at the workplace, but the perceived stress or pressures which influence the marital relationship. The challenges of interfacing work and home take on new dimensions in the case of couples with separate career graphs especially in the Indian context and they deserve careful inquiry from a sociological perspective from time to time.

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