



Mediating Effect of Self Silencing and Cultural Expectations in Social Isolation and Psychological Well Being of Established Adult Women Having Anuptaphobia

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ABSTRACT

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Initially, this study aimed to examine mediation between social isolation and psychological well being by self silencing and cultural expectations. The purposive sample in this study comprised of 390 adult established women aged 30-45. The participants completed the self-report demographic and standardized measures assessing fear of being single, social isolation, psychological well-being, self silencing, and perceived cultural expectations. Data was collected through mobile app that was especially designed for this study. For the data analysis, descriptive statistics, correlational procedures, regression technique, and mediation analysis were applied. Results depicted partial mediation between fear of being single and psychological well being, while taking self silencing and perceived cultural expectations as mediators. This study imply the critical role of self silencing behaviors, cultural expectations, and social isolation on the psychological well being of adult established women with anuptaphobia. Similarly, employment status, limited socioeconomic resources, lower level of education, and reduced income were associated with anupaphobia. Birth order and family system were also associated with anuptaphobia, women from collectivistic culture or extended family systems, often encounter greater societal pressure and closer scrutiny concerning marriage. The implications of this for the future research as well as bringing targeted clinical intervention for established adult women with anuptaphobia.

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1.0 Introduction

Societies in Pakistan have set marriage is an obligation and to be fulfilled by women in a certain age, the reason is that women's fertility declines faster than man after the age of 35. Cultural norms expect women to give priority to marriage rather than career or personal independence (Moseley & Read, 2002). Therefore, such societal pressures may lead to cultivate anuptaphobia among unmarried women. Hence, the number of researches on this phenomenon in South Asia, including Pakistan are very few. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between social isolation, cultural expectations, psychological well-being, and anuptaphobia. The study also aims to determine whether improved psychological well-being could positively influence and mitigate symptoms of anuptaphobia.

Given that discussions around anuptaphobia are considered taboo in Pakistan, the research seeks to shed light on the lived experiences of women affected by this fear. Specifically, it investigates the effect of self-silencing and rejection sensitivity on psychological wellbeing of women having anuptaphobia. Research on anuptaphobia is notably limited in Pakistan and across South Asia. Age thirty is considered a pivotal and stressful time for women in Pakistan, as societal expectations dictate that women should marry before this age. At family gatherings, the issue of a woman's age is often raised as a point of concern (Dar, 2018). The study also hypothesizes that factors such as, age, family structure, and socio-economic status may be significant predictors of anuptaphobia in adult women.

This study primarily explores the correlation between psychological well being and fear of social isolation and the role of self silencing and cultural expectations as mediators, among established adult women with anuptaphobia. This exploration is pertinent to women population, because they often encounter distinct societal pressure related to social roles and relationship expectations, which may deeply affect their psychological well being (Fotiadis et al., 2023). Women are expected to fulfill social expectations in cultural context where societies strongly emphasize collective harmony and relational conformity, which may engage women in self silencing behavior, that may affect their psychological well being (Lee et al., 2025).

The single women experience multifaceted psychological issues in collectivist society of Pakistan where marriage and familial structures are given priority (Mukherjee et al., 2025). The age ranged 30-45 this period is considered established adulthood (Mehta et al., 2020). According to DePaulo (2012), in this age range single people were reported happier than separated, divorced or unhappily married couple, conversely, less happier than happily married people.

1.1 Objectives

1. To investigate the serial mediating role of self-silencing and cultural expectations in the relationship between social isolation and psychological well-being of established adult women with anuptaphobia
2. To investigate the demographics such as age, employment status, family system, and net income, birth order, and education in development of established adult women with anuptaphobia.

2.0 Literature Review

The number of single women has been increasing globally; however, societies are biased and in favor of partnered individuals, and marginalizing single women either directly or indirectly through institutional practices and cultural expectations. This discrepancy repeatedly makes established adult women vulnerable to greater societal scrutiny and pressure to achieve traditional relationship milestones, which may contribute to the development of anuptaphobia.

This implicit biased societal attitude towards singlehood fosters internalized feelings of shame and a sense personal inadequacy, making single women to leave their life goals behind and pursue romantic relationship. The influence of digital media further intensified this pressure by showing idealized partnered life that foster feelings of insufficiency and emphasize to follow the romantic validation (Thumboo & Mukherjee, 2024). Therefore, it put pressure on single to women to form or stay in a relationship, even not satisfied, just to avoid being judged for being single in the society (Pepping et al., 2024). Thus, it also compels women to follow traditional dating expectations, where they are expected to act in certain typical roles in relationships. Hence, this limiting their independence and affect their wellbeing negatively (Alba et al., 2023).

Anuptaphobia can be understood from the perspective of attachment theory that posits early relationship experience the self perception of individuals, which may affect their relationship later in adulthood. In particular, insecure attachment styles, such as anxious-preoccupied and fearful-avoidant attachment, make women vulnerable to greater fear of being single, because they strongly seek emotional closeness and reassurance, while at the same time fearing rejection or abandonment (Xavier et al., 2024). The fear of remaining single is intensified when women see it difficult to find a suitable partner that results in feeling of urgency or desperation to be in a relationship. is supports the view of anxiety as a persistent and hard-to-manage feeling of worry (Gkintoni & Ortíz, 2023). Additionally, this theory helps explain fear of being single increases among women who feel like time is running out or that their circumstances make it harder to meet someone and especially when they perceive their social or economic options are starting to limit (Zhong & Huang, 2024).

According to Coşkun et al. (2023), anuptaphobia is defined as a significant psychological distress results from the feeling of remaining being single, which results in persistent anxiety and weakened sense of self-worth. Gonen et al. (2024) suggest that for established adult women, the social stigma associating singlehood to isolation make anuptaphobia into a severe fear of being marginalized, compel women to search for a partner feel like a necessity for social survival rather than a personal wish. Moreover, the coping strategies and decision making of established adult women are diminished due to anuptaphobia, such as staying or entering into a wrong relationship just to avoid perceived stigma of being single. Such avoidance behaviors can only aggravate anxietie, this create confusion loop where there is both a strong desire for a relationship and an intense fear of staying single. This frequent effort to find partner, results from anuptaphobia, reduce established adult women's sense of independence and weaken their self identity because the relationship status. Consequently, leading to mental health difficulties, increased anxiety and depressive symptoms among women having anupaphobia (Litan, 2025; Wu et al., 2024).

2.1 Rationale

Researches have reported that women with fear of being single often experience attachment anxieties, emotional dependency, and poor life satisfaction. Mostly, studies have been carried out in western societies emphasizing on romantic aspect of the relationship rather than psychological well being. In collectivistic cultures, marriage and marital status are viewed as source to gain social identity and respectability. As a result, women who remain single experience increase fears of social rejection and exclusion, as individuals have to deal with the social stigma attached to non-traditional life choices (Apostolou, 2015).

Further, self silencing is an important psychological factor that influence relationship. Studies have linked self silencing with depression, poor self esteem and psychological well being. Although, studies have not explored the relationship between self silencing and anuptaphobia.

On the other hand, cultural expectations regarding the marriage also affect the psychological state of women. Those societies that tied marriage to family honor and social respectability, single women are pressurized to conform to traditional marital roles. Therefore, single established women experience increased fear of social isolation which may lead to emotional distress (Apostolou, 2015; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016). Hence, very few empirical studies have focused on the relevance of cultural expectations affecting the psychological well being of women with anuptaphobia.

In contrast, previous researches have explored anuptaphobia in association with loneliness and psychological well being, while leaving several gaps in the literature regarding anuptaphobia among established adult women. First, extremely limited researches were carried out in Pakistan on anuptaphobia. Secondly, previous studies rarely investigated the psychological process how fear of social isolation influence the psychological well being. In particular, self silencing and cultural expectation as mediators were not empirically examined. Crucially, covering this gap is important to understand psychological experiences of established adult women with anuptaphobia in the cultures where marriage is highly valued.

Therefore, the goal of the current study is to investigate the influence of social isolation on the psychological well being of established adult women with anuptaphobia, and as well as the mediating roles of self-silencing and cultural expectations. Within the Pakistani sociocultural context, this study aims to add the valuable data to existing literature on established adult women's mental health, associated relationship anxiety, and how cultural environments influence psychological outcome.

3.0 Methodology

The quantitative research design approach, which involves cross-sectional survey research, was employed in gathering data on social isolation, psychological well-being, and cultural expectations and self-silencing as mediators in the development of anuptaphobia among established adult women. Purposive sampling was applied in collecting data for this research. For that reason, data collection for this research was conducted among individuals who possessed characteristics required in this study, such as those suffering from anuptaphobia. Participants' ages ranging from 30 to 45 years surveyed. The entire sample size determined 377. Female Participants were selected from diverse backgrounds, including various socio-economic statuses and cultural

groups, to ensure a representative sample from different divisions of *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* (KP). Participants not meeting the criteria of age range such as below 30 years or above 45 years of age were excluded from the study. The individuals not fulfilling the relationship status criteria like engaged, married and single females with any psychological illness were also excluded from the study. Then, the participants were briefed about the use of app i.e., was used for the data collection in the present study. The app contained detailed debriefing, informed consent, and all the measures used in the study. To prevent repetitive entries by participants, unique user identification function was embodied in the app by creation of account and device-based IDs were introduced. Informed consent was provided in the app for the users, so they can withdraw or delete their data any time. Besides, privacy and confidentiality of the users was ensured by adding features like session timeouts. Whenever, a participant submitted the survey, it would appear to app admin particularly the researcher. Finally, the data was analyzed through SPSS version 26.

For the data collection, this study employed six measures that are Lubben social Network Scale (LSNS), Perceived Cultural Logic Scale (PCLS), The silencing the self-scale (TSTS), Ryff Psychological Wellbeing scale (RPSW), Fear of Being Single (FOBS) Scale, and Demographic Information Form. The PCLS is comprised of total 23 items, and has three dimensions that are dignity, honor, and face subscale. Iram, Hassan, and Iqbal developed this scale in 2023. On this 5 point Likert scale, the respondents were to answer each item based on their agreement (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). PCLS has shown good reliability of .91.

To assess the degree of social isolation the Lubben Social Network Scale (LSNS) was used in this study. Isolation as assessed by measuring the size, frequency, and perceived supportiveness of an individual’s social network (Lubben, 1988). The scale contained questions related to reporting the number of friends and frequency of interaction and ability to request help from them. The Shorter form was used LSNS-6 that consisted of 6-Items. Responses were typically rated on a 6-point Likert scale, with scores indicating the degree of social isolation. In this study, the LSNS-6, the scale demonstrated Cronbach’s alpha of 0.83. Lower scores, particularly below a threshold of 12 on the LSNS-6, suggest a risk of social isolation (Lubben et al., 2006).

Self silencing was measured using the silencing the self-scale (Jack, 1991), a self report instrument is to assess the degree to which individuals hide or suppress their thoughts, feelings, and personal needs to avoid conflict or maintain relationship. The fear of being single scale was used to measure anuptaphobia (Spielmann et al., 2013). This instrument consists of 6 items and the current study exhibited an excellent reliability of 0.92. The Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989) was utilized to assess the psychological well-being of established adult women. The 42-item version of the scale, was chosen for its comprehensive nature, measures six key dimensions of well-being: self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, and autonomy.

4.0 Findings and Results

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 1(N = 390)

Variable	Categories	N	%	M	SD
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Employment Status	Part time	148	37.9		
	Full time	189	48.5		
	Self employed	53	13.6		
Birth Order	First born	148	37.9		
	Middle born	97	24.9		
	Last born	96	24.6		
	Only child	49	12.6		
Family System	Nuclear	191	49		
	Joint	199	51		
Age				37.6	4.28
Net-Income				59163.1	48316.9
Education				16.1	2.73

Note. Age, net income, and education is presented as a continuous variable. All other variables are categorical and reported in frequencies and percentages. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

Table 2 Mediation Analysis for Self-silencing and Cultural expectation in relationship between Social Isolation and Psychological Wellbeing of established adult women with Anuptaphobia (N=390)

Path	β	SE	95% CI (LL, UL)	p
LSNS → SSS (a ₁)	-.852	0.075	[-2.559, -2.263]	< .001
SSS → PCLS (d ₂₁)	0.433	.069	[.348, .621]	< .001
PCLS → PWB (b ₂)	-0.695	0.048	[-1.183, -.993]	< .001
SSS → PWB (b ₁)	0.120	0.070	[0.073, 0.348]	< .05
LSNS → PCLS (a ₂)	-0.366	0.196	[-1.545, -.773]	< .001
LSNS → PWB (c, total effect)	.801	0.150	[3.678, 4.270]	< .001
LSNS → PWB (c', direct effect)	.392	0.195	[1.563, 2.330]	< .001

Indirect via SSS (a_1b_1)	-.1025	.0328	[-0.1687, -0.0386]	Significant
Indirect via PCLS (a_2b_2)	0.254	.036	[.1803, .3267]	Significant
Indirect via SSS → PCLS ($a_1d_2b_2$)	.256	.041	[.1770, .3415]	Significant
Total Indirect Effect	0.409	0.0314	[.3484, .4700]	Significant

Note. X = Social Isolation (LSNS) = Luban Social Networking Scale, PWB= Psychological Wellbeing, SSS= Self Silencing Scale, Cultural Expectation (PCLS) = Perceived Cultural Logic Scale, B = Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, SE = Standard Error, CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit.

Table 5 shows the output for the serial mediation where the mediators are self-silencing (M1) and cultural expectations (M2). This is conducted on social isolation (X) and psychological well-being (Y). Pathway a_1 proves that there was a significant prediction between X and M1 ($\beta = -.852, p < .001$) Self-silencing. Path d_{21} : There is a significant prediction between M1 and M2 ($\beta = 0.433, p < .001$), thus demonstrating a process sequence. Path b_2 : The significant prediction of M2 on Y ($\beta = -0.695, p < .001$). The serial mediation effect ($a_1d_2b_2$) of $\beta = .256$ captures the primary serial mediation ($X \rightarrow M1 \rightarrow M2 \rightarrow Y$). The serial mediation effect's confidence intervals do not contain zero, proving the significance of mediation. The direct relationship between X and Y (c') path also remains significant ($\beta = 0.392, p < .001$), meaning that even after considering the mediator variables, social isolation significantly affects Psychological Wellbeing through partial mediation. The indirect effects were tested using bootstrapping techniques, and the confidence intervals of all the paths exclude zero. See Figure 1.

Figure 1 Serial Multiple Mediation Model Illustrating the Relationship between Social Isolation and Psychological Well being

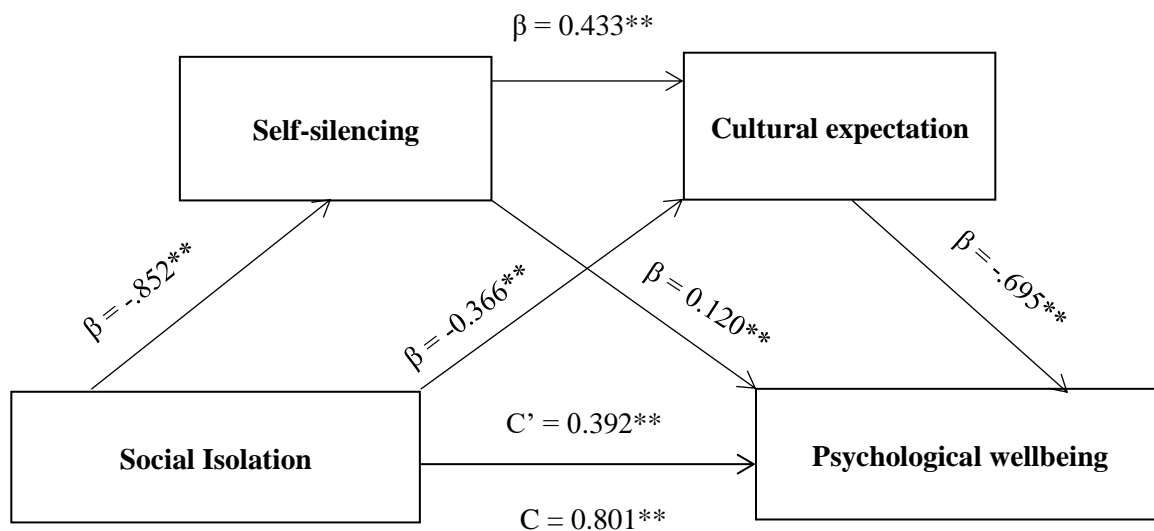


Table 3 Hierarchical Regression Results of Birth Order Age, Education, Family Monthly Income, Family system and Work Status on Adult Women Experiencing Anuptaphobia (N = 390)

Predictors	<i>B</i>	β	SE <i>B</i>	95% CI		<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	<i>p</i>
				LL	UL			
Step 1						.09	.08	.00
Constant	31.22		2.41	26.48	35.96			.00
Birth order	1.48	.28	.25	-1.96	-0.97			.00
Age	1.16	-.09	.06	-.23	-.01			.00
Step 2						.731	.729	.00
Constant	51.65		1.55	48.59	54.72			.00
Birth order	.15	.009	.14	-.24	.33			.05
Age	.80	-.034	.03	-.11	.02			.05
Education	-1.59	-.797	.07	-1.73	-1.47			.00
Income	-1.12	-.098	.00	.00	.00			.00
Step 3						.738	.729	.00
Constant	50.42		1.72	47.04	53.81			.00
Age	.74	-.03	.03	-.11	.03			.05
Education	-1.57	-.78	.07	-1.71	-1.44			.00
Income	-.09	-.09	.00	.00	.00			.00
Family system	.50	.05	.30	-.09	1.097			.05
Work Status	.07	-.01	.21	.50	.34			.71

Note. *CI* = Confidence Interval, *LL* = Lower Limit, *UL* = Upper Limit, *B* = Unstandardized Coefficient, β = Standardized Coefficient, ΔR^2 = Change in R square.

The predictors used in step one accounted for 9% of the explained variations in the dependent variable, as evidenced by an R^2 of .09 ($F(2, 387) = 18.85, p < .01$). The predictors in step 2 were able to explain 73% of significant variations on experiencing anuptaphobia, as the value of R^2 .73 ($F(4, 385) = 262.01, p < .01$). Similarly, the predictors in step 3 were able to explain 73% of significant variations on experiencing anuptaphobia as the value of R^2 .74 ($F(6, 383) = 175.56, p < .01$).

The predictors in step 2 were able to explain 73 % variations in the outcome, the findings indicated that birth order ($B = 1.48, p < .01$) and age ($B = .116, p < .05$) positively predicted the adult women experiencing anuptaphobia significantly. Similarly, the step 2 results indicated that education ($B = -1.59, p < .01$) and income ($B = 1.12, p < .01$) negatively predicted the experiencing of anuptaphobia.

Moreover, step 3 explained that education ($B = -1.57, p < .01$) and income ($B = -.07, p < .01$), family system ($B = .50, p < .05$) significantly predicted the experiencing of anuptaphobia respectively while and work status remained nonsignificant. The ΔR^2 value . in step 2 ΔR^2 value .729 discovered 72.9% change in variation model 1 and 2 with $\Delta F(2, 389) = 9.87, p < .01$. Similarly, ΔR^2 value .729 in step 3 revealed 73.8 % of variations in step 3 with $\Delta F(4, 389) = 10.54, p < .01$.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The first hypothesis delves into the intricate relationship between social isolation and psychological well-being among adult women with anuptaphobia, specifically examining the mediating roles of self-silencing and cultural expectations within this dynamic. The results (Table 1,) of this study revealed that self silencing and cultural expectations partially mediated the relationship between social isolation and psychological well being. Furthermore, serial path of social isolation → selfsilencing → cultural expectations → psychological well being was also significant, and confirmed a dual-step mediating mechanism . The findings of the present study conceptually similar to the previous research on self silencing that investigated the comprehensive examination of how cultural expectations shape self-silencing behaviors, which subsequently mediate the relationship between social isolation and psychological well-being in anuptaphobic women (Arcand et al., 2023; Coronel-Dávila et al., 2025; Szota et al., 2024). The findings of our study also conceptually related to the possible explanation given by(Kosmicki, 2017)that the interaction between deeply ingrained cultural norms, the pressure to maintain family honor, and the societal expectation of marriage can significantly amplify the psychological burden on anuptaphobic women, driving them towards self-silencing as a coping mechanism, which ultimately undermines their psychological well-being. Similarly, John et al. (2022) further elaborated that these pervasive societal pressures can induce a heightened state of stress, contributing to the elevated prevalence of common mental health disorders like depression and anxiety observed in women. The cultural expectations demanding women to engage in marriage and bear children induce psychological distress especially in women experiencing anuptaphobia, that consequently leading to adapt self-silencing behaviors as a coping strategy to deal with perceived social disapproval (Hendriansyah et al., 2024), negatively affecting their psychological well being and worsen feeling of isolation (He et al., 2024).

Secondly, this study also hypothesized that demographics age, birth order, education, employment status, family system, and net income would affect the level of anuptaphobia among established adult women. This study found that anuptaphobia was significantly predicted by age, birth order, education, and income. Conversely, family system and work status were not significantly predicted anuptaphobia. see Table 3. This broad perspective indicated that anuptaphobia is not just psychological issue but shaped by person's social, cultural, and economic environment. The finds of the current study are similar in term of demographic age with previous studies conducted by Spielmann et al. (2013), which showed that the increase in the ages of single women also led to an increase in anxiety and distress about being single. Further, findings are also consistent with research conducted by Ammara and Jameel, (2022) in Pakistan, that anuptaphobia was positive correlated with increase in age.

Regarding the birth order, the current study findings are aligned with the study of Jain and Sharma (2024), suggested that the early familial experiences shaped by birth order, particularly parenting methods, have been demonstrated to influence mental health outcomes, including anxiety levels which could indirectly contribute to the development or mitigation of anuptaphobia.

The currents study's findings also revealed that income is the predictor of anuptaphobia among established women. The observed results are partially consistent the study conducted by

John et al. (2022) that Conversely, lower net income might exacerbate anuptaphobia by increasing a woman's reliance on a potential partner for economic stability, making the prospect of remaining unmarried a source of significant anxiety and insecurity.

Moreover, increased fear of being single may be because of financial insecurity and thus marriage is viewed as way to secure financial stability and social protection in a condition with limited resources. Therefore, this economic factor further reveal the a strong connection between socioeconomic status and mental health, depicting that for established adult women, financial instability put tremendous psychological pressure to follow traditional marriage expectations. Similarly, the results of this study aligned with the findings of Tran et al. (2018) that explained financial stress is direct consequence of lower net income, and both contribute to the heightened anxiety levels, development of anuptaphobia.

Education as a demographic also significantly predicted anuptaphobia in this study. The findings are consistent with by Apostolou and Tekeş, (2023) found established adult women with high level of education may encounter conflict either to follow social expectations and marry or attain their personal or career goals, thus increasing the fear of remaining single. This pattern can be explained by the study that stated internal conflict can be exacerbated by the societal pressure to maintain a traditional family structure, which may clash with the contemporary aspirations of highly educated women (Safiudin, 2024).

Furthermore, family systems like nuclear or join family settings especially in collectivistic culture, may significantly influence the level of support or pressure faced by women in making decision about marriage, for example, nuclear families value person autonomy compared to joint families emphasized cultural expectations. Therefore, this affects mental health of women, as they prioritize family harmony over personal goals within the traditional arranged marriage system (Khanna & Khatri, 2013).

5.1 Conclusion

Finally, they study's findings revealed a partial mediation between social isolation and psychological well being that is mediated by self silencing and cultural expectations, suggesting that because of the societal norms, pressure and cultural expectations about marriage, women suppress their thoughts and emotion that lead to reduced psychological well being. Further, in this study some demographic variables such as age, education etc. were found to be significantly affecting anuptaphobia. Hence, anuptaphobia is not only psychological phenomenon but has roots in social and structural contexts. For established adult women, increased in age aggravate societal pressure regarding marriage, that results in greater fear of being single. Similarly, women experiencing financial insecurity shows high dependency and may find marriage as solution to these insecurities which may expose them to anuptaphobia. Further, the analysis highlighted, birth order and family system also influence anuptaphobia, as women in collectivistic or extended family systems, are expected to conform to cultural expectations or social norms about marriage.

Contribution

Kiran Tahir: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

Israr Muhammad: Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

Syeda Farhana Kazmi: Methodology and Revision

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest in this article's research, authorship, and publication.

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