Predictors of Relational Turbulence in Early Years of Marriage

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Current cross-sectional study assessed relational uncertainty and partner interference as predictors of relational turbulence in early years of marriage. Total 108 first time married couples (N =216) with age range 21-45 years (M = 30.71, SD = 5.42), 1 to 10 years of duration of marriage and minimum education of 12 years were included as research participants through purposive sampling from Lahore. Relational Uncertainty Scale (RUS; Knobloch, 2007), Partner Interference Scale (PIS; Knobloch & Solomon, 2004), Relational Turbulence Scale (RTS; Knobloch, 2007) were used as assessment measures. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) through Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) was used and Common Fate Model (Kenny, 1996; Peugh, DiLillo & Panuzio, 2013) was applied to analyze the study variables at a dyadic level, taking couples as unit of analysis. Results revealed that relational uncertainty and partner interference were positive predictors of relational turbulence in young married couples. The study has implications in marital and couple counseling.

*Keywords***.** Relational uncertainty, partner interference, relational turbulence, married couples

In early years of marriage, spouses face a variety of challenging situations, ranging from uncertainty in relationship to goal interference activities from the partner (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005), which in turn leads to poor adjustment and more turbulence in marriage (Theiss & Solomon, 2006a; 2006b; Theiss, Knobloch, Checton, & Magsamen-Conrad, 2009; Knobloch & Theiss, 2010 ; Theiss & Nagy, 2013). Relational turbulence is described as a subjective experience of turmoil that occurs when romantic relationships are developing (Knobloch, 2007). The different responses people give to events in a relationship point to significant questions as annoyances resulting from adjustment process with each other sometimes result in conflicts but at other times they go unnoticed establishing marital interdependence as an answer (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001; 2004; Knobloch, 2007; McLaren,

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2008).

Solomon and Knobloch (2004); Solomon and Theiss (2008) presented the relational turbulence model to explain range of negative interpersonal experiences that emphasize the distress period couples experience initially in close relationships. Consequently, the model illuminates relational turbulence as excessive affective, cognitive and behavioral reactivity or responsiveness to events of interpersonal nature. In the past decade studies have been conducted to test this model in passionate relationships (Theiss & Solomon, 2006a, 2006b ; Solomon & Theiss, 2008; Theiss et al., 2009; Knobloch & Theiss, 2010) and during changes in more established and close relationships (e.g., Theiss & Solomon, 2008; Knobloch & Theiss, 2010; Theiss & Nagy, 2013).

Uncertainty has been highlighted as an imperative construct to explore initial turmoil in marriage. Relational uncertainty is referred to as the degree of certainty people have regarding the nature and extent of involvement in a relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, 2002). The construct of relational uncertainty emerges from three distinct sources of doubt which are partner uncertainty corresponding the ambiguity regarding the other person's involvement or commitment to the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004; McLaren, 2008), self-uncertainty denoting the doubts an individual has about self- involvement in a relationship; and relationship uncertainty representing level of doubt about partner's involvement that leads to question self-involvement in a relationship i.e., doubt in the relationship as a unit (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999; Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). Empirical tests have shown that self, partner and relationship uncertainty come under a larger construct called relational uncertainty (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004; McLaren, 2008). In the field of communication research relational uncertainty has received considerable attention (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Theiss & Solomon, 2006). A growing body of research indicates that transitions in intimate relationships or marriage are embarked by extreme emotions (Aune, Aune, & Buller, 1994). In addition, uncertain people report more topic avoidance that contributes towards clarification of any issue that raises conflict (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Partners facing uncertainty in relationships are more likely to evaluate partners' disturbing and annoying behaviors as undesirable and damaging to the relationship (Theiss & Knobloch, 2006), furthermore, relational uncertainty has been observed to be inversely related to relational well-being

(Knobloch, 2008) and thus can be considered source of turbulence in marriages.

The second component of relational turbulence model is interference from a partner. When the actions sequences are disrupted before completion, people experience negative evoking arousals (Knobloch, Miller, Bond, & Manone, 2007; Owlett, 2010). Partner interference can be explained as perception of the extent to which an individual's plans and actions are interrupted by a spouse's behvior (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004). Both relational uncertainty and partner interference have been associated with more negative feelings and cognitions such as sadness, anger, fear and jealousy (Knobloch, Solomon, & Cruz, 2001; Theiss & Solomon, 2006a; Knobloch, 2007; Knobloch, Miller & Carpenter, 2007). In addition, there has been observed that relational uncertainty and perception of interference from partner lead to misunderstandings among couples (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004), experienced irritations (Theiss & Solomon, 2006b), and communication problems (Harvey-Knowles & Faw, 2016). Further, Ellis, and Ledbetter (2015) found relational uncertainty mediating between relational continuity constructional units and relational turbulence and partner interference mediating between physical distance and relational turbulence. Intensified reactivity is the result of interference from partner with perceptions that hurtful messages are harmful for the relationship (Theiss et al., 2009) and perceptions that irritations are more harmful for the relationship (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). Moreover, under conditions of interference and relational uncertainty, romantic partner perceive their other relationships as hindering the development of romantic relation (Knobloch & Donovan-Kicken, 2006).

All the above mentioned researches have been conducted in west where dynamics of marriage are different from eastern countries like Pakistan, where institution of marriage is stronger than in west. However, in recent years rate of divorce has alarmingly increased in Pakistan (Zakaria, 2015) and 3.4 % of the total population falls under the category of divorced in 2017 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017) with most of divorced couples falling in the age range of 22 and 30 (Hussnain, 2014). Due to the increase in the Divorce rates among young couples over the years, there is a need to address the initial distress period and investigate the causal factors with the application of Relational Turbulence Model in Pakistani population,

as it has not been addressed in Pakistan before. Some linked phenomenon has been reported in indigenous studies. For example Haak (2010) stated that conflict and distress can have a significant impact on marital relationships, as well as the mental and emotional health of couples. Moreover, researchers examining communication patterns in couple relationships have identified destructive patterns in which couples engage in while adapting to the newly formed relationship. The demand-withdraw pattern is a pervasive pattern for distressed couples (Hashmi, Khurshi, & Hassan, 2006; Haak, 2010). Demand may be in the form of interference from partner and withdraw may be a reflection of uncertainty that might account for turbulence in relationship and later on leading towards dissolution of marriage. Further, most of the studies have been conducted with reference to women issues in marriage. Mehmood and Najeeb (2013) discussed that main responsibility of adjusting to new environment and new people in new house lies on wife and is main source of stress in newly married women. Criticism which is form of interference, and fear of husband's second marriage that is reflection of relational uncertainty have also been observed as major stressors in marriage experienced by women (Hassan, Khurshid, & Batool, 2015). Moreover, family pressures have also been reported to hinder open communications regarding marital problems (Qadeer, DeSilva, Prince, & Khan, 2007) which further add to unhappy marriage. All the aforementioned studies have been conducted at individual level, i.e., either they have been conducted with husbands or wives. None of these studies have studied couples as unit of analysis.

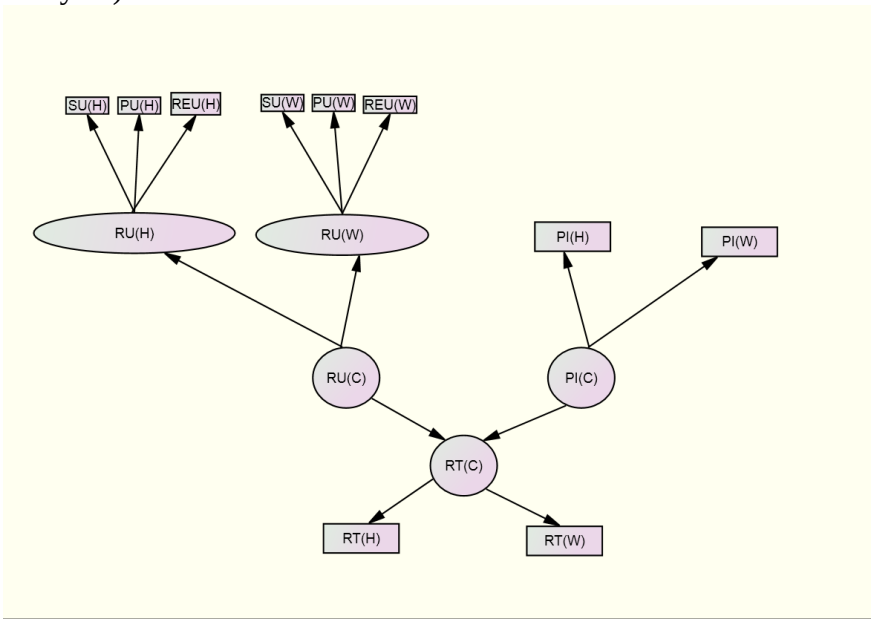
Therefore current study aimed to see how relational uncertainty and partner interference are related to relational turbulence in married couples.

Hypotheses

Accordingly following hypotheses were drawn:

- Relational uncertainty would be a positive predictor of relational turbulence in young married couples.
- Partner interference would be a positive predictor of relational turbulence in young married couples.

Figure 1. Common Fate Hypothetical Model (couples as unit of analysis)



Note. SU(H) = Self Uncertainty of Husband; PU(H) = Partner Uncertainty of Husband; REU(H) = Relationship Uncertainty of Husband ; RU(H) = Relational Uncertainty of Husbands; PI(H) = Partner Interference of Husband; RT(H) = Relational Turbulence of Husbands; SU(W) = Self Uncertainty of Wives; PU(W) = Partner Uncertainty of Wives; REU(W) = Relationship Uncertainty of Wives ; RU(W) = Relational Uncertainty of Wives; PI(W) = Partner Interference of Wives; RT(W) = Relational Turbulence of Wives; RU(C) = Relational Uncertainty of Couples ; PI(C) =Partner Interference of Couples ; RT(C) = Relational Turbulence of Couples.

Method

Sample

Correlational research design was used in the present study. The sample comprised of 108 couples (*N*=216). Age range of the married couples was 21-45 years (*M* = 30.71, *SD* = 5.42). Participants were approached through personal acquaintances who were informed about the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only those couples were taken who had marriage duration between 1 to 10 years and an education of intermediate (12 years) or higher according to

purposive sampling. Participants with history of divorce were excluded from the sample of present study.

The sample characteristics for couples are given in Table 1 and separate characteristics of husbands and wives are in description below.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables for Married Couples (N = 108)

Characteristics	*f*	*%*
Family System		
Joint	63	58.3
Nuclear	45	41.7
Type of marriage		
Arranged marriage	73	68.1
Love marriage	35	31.94
Number of children		
No child	27	25
1-2	63	59.26
3-4	18	16.67

In Table 1 the common characteristic of married couples are given in form of frequencies and percentages. Other characteristics include monthly family income in Pakistani rupees with mean of 45217.60 (21720.29) and duration of marriage in years averaged at 4.62 (2.07). The separate characteristics of husbands and wives were as 90 (83.3%) husbands were employed and 18 (16.7%) were unemployed, and in wives 40 (37%) were employed and 68 (63%) were unemployed. For husbands the mean for current age (in years) was 32.76 (5.34) and for wives was 28.68 (4.7). On the other hand, the mean for age (in years) at marriage for husbands was 28.14 (4.44) and wives was 24.05 (1.74). Education in years had a mean of 14.67 (2.03) for husbands and 14.39 (3.97) for wives.

Measures

Relational Uncertainty Scale (RUS). The RUS consisted of 20 items (6 for self-uncertainty, 6 for partner uncertainty and 8 for relationship uncertainty), translated with the permission of the author. Responses consisted of a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = completely or almost completely uncertain, 6 = almost or completely certain). The items were reverse coded and averaged to form

measures of self-uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relationship uncertainty (Knobloch, 2007). The reliability coefficients for self, partner and relationship uncertainty were .87, .90 and .91 respectively. Example for an item of self-uncertainty is "How important the relationship is to you?"

Partner Interference Scale (PIS). The PIS measured the perceived interference from partner/spouse on a scale (1 = strongly agree, 6 = strongly disagree). The items of the scale were translated. The items were reverse coded and averaged to give a final score of partner interference (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004). Seven items measured partner interference with reliability of .89. Item example includes "This person influences the amount of time I spend with other people."

Relational Turbulence Scale (RTS). RTS was used to measure turbulence, participants responded to several 9-point semantic differential scales. The scale was translated. While using standardized procedure respondents were asked to indicate where their relationship fell along dimensions that reflected turmoil (e.g., chaotic - stable, tumultuous - running smoothly); item no. 2, 5, 6, 7, 8 were reverse coded. The scores for all the 9 items were then averaged to give a relational turbulence score (Knobloch, 2007). The scale showed a high reliability .91.

Procedure

The couples were approached and contacted through personal acquaintances at their own places. The appointments were taken through phone calls and were met at the time and place of their convenience. Participants were instructed about how to respond to the items and informed consent was taken from them. Privacy and confidentiality was assured. The husbands and wives were instructed to fill questionnaires separately in the presence of the researcher. A total of 168 couples were contacted, 108 couples filled the questionnaire. The response rate was 64%.

Results

This section includes the descriptive statistics of study variables for husbands and wives, correlations among study variables, and results from SEM through AMOS for testing hypotheses (common fate model; taking couples as unit of analysis).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Self-Uncertainty, Partner Uncertainty, Relationship Uncertainty, Partner Interference and Relational Turbulence for Husbands (n =108) and Wives (n = 108)

	Husbands		Wives	
Variables	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
1. Self-Uncertainty	1.82	1.00	1.82	.91
2. Partner Uncertainty	1.80	1.01	1.77	1.00
3. Relationship Uncertainty	2.01	.94	2.01	1.01
4. Partner Interference	2.22	1.17	2.34	1.20
5. Relational Turbulence	2.56	1.13	2.70	1.21

Table 3 shows self, partner and relationship uncertainty revealed a positive relationship with partner interference and relational turbulence in husbands as well as in wives. Moreover, partner interference also had a positive relationship with relational turbulence in husbands and wives

Table 3

Relationship Between Self-Uncertainty, Partner Uncertainty, Relationship Uncertainty, Partner Interference and Relational Turbulence in Married Couples (N = 216)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Self-Uncertainty		.86***	.78***	.41***	.26**
2. Partner Uncertainty	.80***		.84***	.46***	.33**
3. Relationship Uncertainty	.64***	.77***		.51***	.39***
4. Partner Interference	.25***	.32**	.29**		.30**
5. Relational Turbulence	.24*	.36***	.26**	.38***	

Note. Above the diagonal= husbands; Below the diagonal= wives

* p <.05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

Since sample size was not enough to incorporate both variables (relational uncertainty and partner interference) in one model due to complex techniques (Wolf, Harrington, Clark, & Miller, 2013; Soper, 2016). Therefore, two separate models were analyzed. AMOS was used to analyze path model and structural relations between relational uncertainty and relational turbulence (Final Model A) and partner interference and relational turbulence (Model B). Revised model fitting for model A indicated a good fit

(Table 4). In Final model A, primarily the construct relational uncertainty of couples (exogenous variable) was proposed from two different latent constructs of husbands' and wives' relational uncertainty (First order CFA) which in turn were proposed from observed variables of self, partner and relationship uncertainty of both the husband and wives separately (Second order CFA). Same scenario was for relational turbulence (endogenous variable) consisting of a CFA proposing the relational turbulence of husbands and wives as relational turbulence of couples. Following were the fit indices for Final Model A presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Model Fit Indices for Relational Uncertainty as Predictor of Relational Turbulence in Married Couples (N = 216)

Model	χ^2	*p*	*df*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Model A	20.10	.21	16	.99	.99	.05

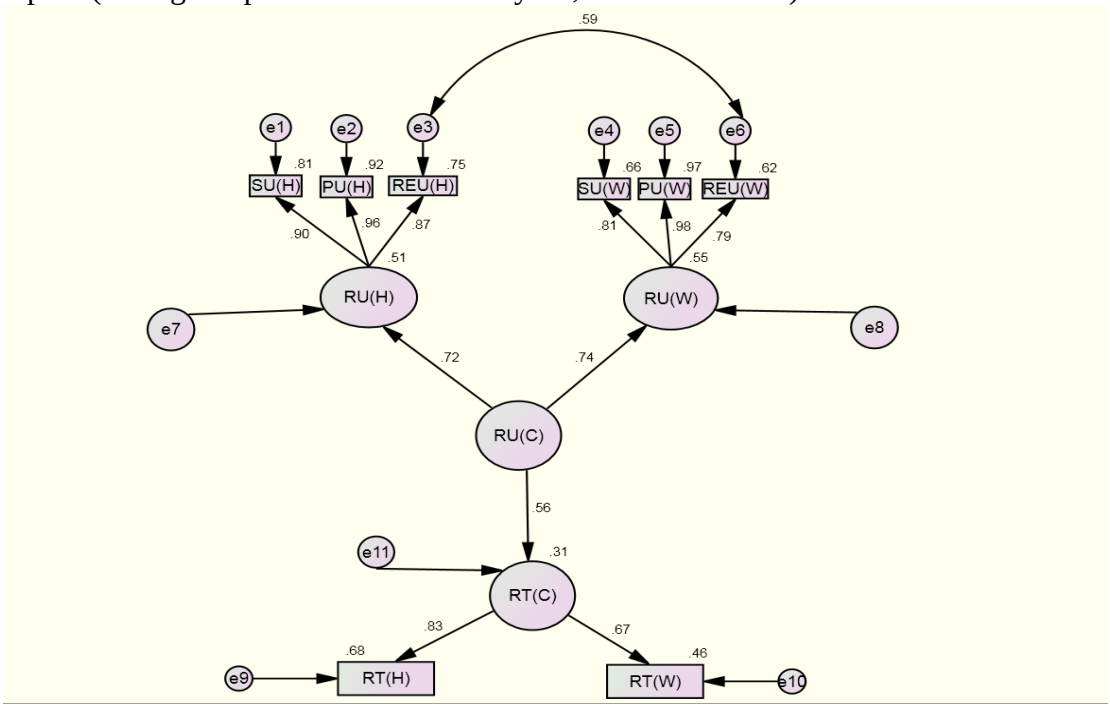
Note. CFI= Comparative fit index; TLI= Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA=root mean square error of approximation

Since Chi-square for the initial model was 55.89 with $p < .001$, RMSEA was .15 and CFI and TLI values were .94 and .90 respectively considerably revealing poor fit of the data with the hypothesized model (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Hooper, Coughlan & Mullen, 2008). For model modification to provide a good fit, a covariance between errors (e3 and e6) was added for the model modification (suggested by modification indices). After modification, the final model rendered a good fit; indices are shown in Table 4. The chi-square change between initial model and modified model (Final Model A) was also significant ($\Delta\chi^2=35.89$, $p<.001$).

As the LVM (Latent Variable Model) primarily comprised of CFA for the relational uncertainty proposed from self, partner and relationship uncertainty for husbands and wives separately, loadings were as .90, .96 and .87 for self, partner and relationship uncertainty respectively for husbands and .81, .98 and 79 for wives. Moreover, the relational uncertainty for husbands explained 81%, 92%, and 76% of variances in self, partner and relationship uncertainty respectively and 66%, 97%, and 63% variances were explained by wives' relational uncertainty.

The second order CFA was applied to make the latent factors of husband and wives' relational uncertainty into couple relational uncertainty yielded factor loading of .72 and .74 respectively. The CFA for husbands and wives relational turbulence as a part of couples' relational turbulence yielded loadings of .84 and .66 for husbands and wives respectively. The loadings were above .4 which is the standard criterion to retain the indicators explaining the latent factor (Matsunga, 2010). The results indicated that the relational uncertainty (B = 0.71, p = .004) was a positive predictor of relational turbulence of the married couples, affirming H1. The structural illustration is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. A Complex Multivariate Model Measuring Relational Uncertainty As Predictor of Relational Turbulence in Married Couples (taking couples as units of analyses; Final Model A)



Note. A complex multivariate model of one exogenous variable and eleven endogenous variables. Parameter estimates(Standardized). Error variances indicate the amount of unexplained variance as e1, e2, e3, e4, e5, e6, e7, e8, e9, e10, e11. SU(H) = Self Uncertainty of Husband; PU(H) = Partner Uncertainty of Husband; REU(H) = Relationship Uncertainty of Husband ; RU(H) = Relational

Uncertainty of Husbands; RT(H) = Relational Turbulence of Husbands; SU(W) = Self Uncertainty of Wives; PU(W) = Partner Uncertainty of Wives; REU(W) = Relationship Uncertainty of Wives ; RU(W) = Relational Uncertainty of Wives; RT(W) = Relational Turbulence of Wives; RU(C) = Relational Uncertainty of Couples; RT(C) = Relational Turbulence of Couples.

It was further hypothesized that partner interference is likely to be a significant predictor of relational turbulence (H2). The partner interference was also tested as a separate model for analyses at the dyadic level. In Model B primarily the construct partner interference of couples (exogenous variable) was proposed from two different observed variables of husbands' and wives' partner interference. Same situation was for relational turbulence consisting of a CFA proposing the relational turbulence of husbands and wives as couples' relational turbulence (endogenous variable). Following are the fit indices for Model B presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Model Fit Indices for Partner Interference as predictor of Relational turbulence in Married Couples (N = 216)

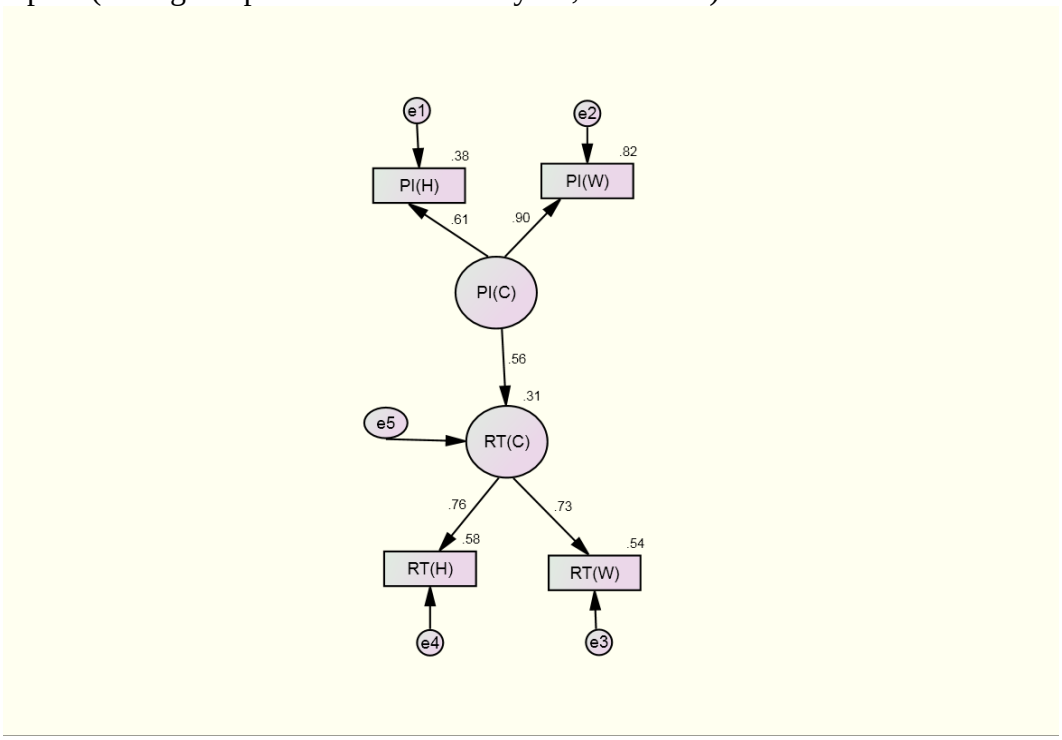
Model	χ^2	*P*	*df*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Model B	1.69	.19	1	.99	.96	.08

Note. CFI=comparative fit index; TLI=Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA=root mean square error of approximation

The fit indices in Table 5 considerably revealed a moderate fit of the data with the hypothesized model, no modifications were done and the Model B was retained as final. The results for CFA of partner interference yielded a moderate fit of the model as illustrated above through the model fit indices. The factor loadings were as .61 and .90 respectively for husbands' and wives' partner interference. Moreover, partner interference for husbands explained 38 % variance in husbands' partner interference and 82 % variance in wives' partner interference. The CFA for husbands and wives relational turbulence as a part of couples' relational turbulence yielded loadings of .76 and .73 for husbands and wives respectively explaining 58 % and 54 % variances in husbands' and wives' relational turbulence, following the standard criterion of loadings (Matsunga, 2010). The results indicated that the partner interference

(B = 0.46, *p* = .003) was a positive predictor of relational turbulence of the married couples, thus approving H2. The figural illustration of Model B is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. A Complex Multivariate Model Measuring Partner Interference As Predictor of Relational Turbulence in Married Couples (taking couples as units of analyses; Model B)



Note. A complex multivariate model of one exogenous variable and five endogenous variables. Parameter estimates(Standardized). Error variances indicate the amount of unexplained variance as e1, e2, e3, e4, e5= residual/error variances; PI(H) = Partner Interference of Husband; RT(H) = Relational Turbulence of Husbands; PI(W) = Partner Interference of Wives; RT(W) = Relational Turbulence of Wives; PI(C) =Partner Interference for Couples ; RT(C) = Relational Turbulence for Couples.

In nutshell, relational uncertainty and partner interference positively predicted relational turbulence in married couples.

Discussion

The present study investigated how relational uncertainty and partner interference are related to relational turbulence in young married couples. It was hypothesized that relational uncertainty would be a positive predictor of relational turbulence in married couples. Results indicated that taking couples individuals as the unit of analyses; relational uncertainty was a positive predictor of relational turbulence (Model 1) as hypothesized. This finding is in line with (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004; Solomon & Theiss, 2008; Theiss & Solomon, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Knobloch & Theiss, 2010, 2011b; Theiss & Nagy, 2013).

The feeling of uncertainty is presumably an uncomfortable state, because it obstructs the ability to interact efficiently also proposed by Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger, 1997). Earlier periods of marriage in which both partners move into a new circumstance which define a new relationship or alter patterns of behavior may be the cause of uncertainty in the relationship. But the reason why this phenomenon causes turbulence may be that uncertainty involves more sadness, anger, fear and jealousy (Knobloch, 2007). Further uncertainty in relationship has also been associated with the problems in communication (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004; Knobloch, 2006) which might further increase sensitivity during times of initial adjustment with the marriage (Solomon & Theiss, 2008).

It was further hypothesized that partner interference is likely to predict relational turbulence in married couples. Results showed that partner interference positively predicted relational turbulence as assumed in accordance with researches which point to the role of interdependence and interference in negative emotions (Knobloch et al., 2007; Theiss & Knobloch, 2008; Owlett, 2010); negative evaluations of the state of the relationship (Theiss et al., 2009); and communication problems (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004; Theiss & Solomon, 2006b; Knobloch, 2008), triggering turbulence in marriage (Agnew et al., 1998).

The results can also be explained with emotion-in-relationships model (Berschied, 1983) which states emotional problems in interpersonal relationships occurs when relationship partners do not fulfill each other's expectations and create hurdles in each other's plans and actions. Further, researchers examining communication patterns in couple relationships have identified destructive patterns in which couples engage in while adapting to the newly formed relationship. The demand-

withdraw pattern is a pervasive pattern for distressed couples (Haak, 2010). The reason for the development of this pattern can be uncertainty in predicting self and partner involvement in the relationship in turn creating distress in marital relationships (Hashmi, Khurshi, & Hassan, 2006).

Conclusion. In nutshell, the turmoil that couples experience in the beginning years of married life is marked by process of interdependence, and is manifested through irritations, small talk, and criticism. The roots extend to uncertainty and interference. Keeping in view the increased divorce rate in early years of marriage in Pakistan, the present study helps to understand the role of relational uncertainty, partner interference and relational turbulence of married couples.

Limitations. Although all the hypotheses were supported, findings should be generalized with caution as the sample was limited to incorporate both predictors in one model. Moreover, cross-sectional data inhibits from drawing any causal inferences.

Implications. Future studies should take a larger sample incorporating both predictors in one model with a longitudinal design in order to better explain the causal relationships. The findings from the study can be helpful in couple and marital counseling while addressing issues causing turmoil in marriage in order to deal with them accordingly.

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