

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTHER-IN-LAW AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW: AN EASTERN PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law has always been portrayed negatively by earlier studies and electronic media. Studies to analyze this relationship mostly belong to Western individualistic cultures. The study involved 440 participants i.e. 217 mothers-in-law and 223 daughters-in-law from Pakistan. Two new scales, each making up 10 items on a 5-point Likert scale, were developed to profile the relationship of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. These scales were evaluated for their reliability and validity before setting up the results. The findings of the study revealed that, in contradiction to the Western studies and electronic media, the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in the understudied culture was significantly positive. The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is not always negative in nature. There is still enough room to explore the understudied relationship in different Eastern and collectivistic cultures to get a holistic picture of the issue.*

**Keywords:** Mother-in-Law; Daughter-in-Law; Relationship; Family; Eastern Culture; Collectivistic Culture.

### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law has been an area of great interest for researchers (Morr Serewicz, 2008; Prentice, 2009). Since the first ever comprehensive study on this relationship by Duvall (Duvall, 1954), most of the researchers in this field have concluded that this relationship is conflictual and largely negative in nature (Adler et al., 1989; Cotterill, 1994; Duvall, 1954; Green et al., 2006; Hung, 2005; Kurdek, 1999; Linn & Breslerman, 1996; Merrill, 2007; Rittenour, 2012; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Rittenour & Kellas, 2015; Sandel, 2004; Shih & Pyke, 2010). The same trend has also been observed through films and TV shows whereby these two women are always shown fighting with each other; especially the mother-in-law is more demonized (Merrill, 2007). Studies have also reported that this relationship is stressful for both the women (Apter, 2010); has negative consequences upon the marital adjustment of the daughter-in-law (Bryant et al., 2001; Mikucki-Enyart, 2011; Morr Serewicz, 2008; Timmer & Veroff, 2000); and negatively affects the entire family (Merrill, 2007; Prentice, 2008).

Studies from the individualistic Western cultures have revealed that the roles of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law within a family are quite ambiguous (Bryant et al., 2001; Lopata, 1999; Merrill, 2007). In collectivistic Eastern cultures, however, these roles have been strictly defined whereby the mother-in-law has more power within the family as compared with the daughter-in-law (An, 2014; Lopata, 1999; Shih & Pyke, 2010) e.g. in Taiwan (Sandel, 2004) and China (Song & Zhang, 2012). There is, however, very less

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literature on the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law from Eastern collectivistic cultures. The current study, therefore, was initiated to bridge this knowledge gap by exploring the aforesaid relationship in a collectivistic Eastern culture.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The study involved 440 participants i.e. 217 mothers-in-law and 223 daughters-in-law from Pakistan. The mothers-in-law were aged between 35 to 94 years; 182 among them were housewives and 35 among them were working women. The daughters-in-law were aged between 18 to 53 years; 147 among them were housewives and 76 among them were working women.

### **The Instruments**

Two separate scales, one for mothers-in-law and the other for daughters-in-law, were developed in Urdu language. Each of these scales comprised of 10 items having a 5-points Likert scale for responses. The scales were named as ‘Sukoon Mother-in-Law Profiler (SMILP)’ and ‘Sukoon Daughter-in-Law Profiler (SDILP)’. Each scale consisted of two different but related dimensions i.e. the Active Relationship and the Passive Relationship. The Active dimension of the relationship was defined as “the attitudes and behaviors of mother-in-law or daughter-in-law toward her counterpart”. The Passive dimension of the relationship was defined as “the perception of mother-in-law or daughter-in-law about the attitudes and behaviors of her counterpart toward her”. Each scale had 5 items for Active Relationship and 5 items for Passive Relationship.

### **Procedure**

The researchers approached the participants of the study individually. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent to participate in the study was appropriately taken. They were assured for the confidentiality of the data and were thanked for their participation.

### **Analysis**

The data gathered was recorded in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. It was cleaned by analyzing missing values, unengaged responses, outliers, linearity, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, skewness, and kurtosis. Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted to measure the reliability and validity of the scale. Correlations, Comparisons and Predictions were also calculated for analyses.

## **FINDINGS**

Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted on 10 items of SMILP and 10 items for SDILP separately. Principal Component Analysis was employed for extraction. The Rotation Method was Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Sampling adequacy, by using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin’s values (Kaiser, 1974) was found meritorious for both SMILP (table 1; KMO=.817) and SDILP (table 1; KMO=.865). Bartlett’s test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1950) was used to analyze the adequacy of correlations between items and was found highly significant for both SMILP (table 1;  $BTS=1012.99$ ;  $p=.000$ ) and SDILP (table 1;  $BTS=1301.24$ ;  $p=.000$ ). The Cronbach’s Alpha reliability for SMILP (table 1;  $\alpha=.87$ ) was good and was excellent for SDILP (table 1;  $\alpha=.90$ ). 2 factors were extracted for SMILP with 59.85% variance explained (table 1). 2 factors were extracted for SDILP with 65.73% variance explained (table 1). Items 1 to 5 of each the scales loaded as a single factor and was labeled as ‘Active Relationship’ as the items reflected the active relationship of mother-in-law or daughter-in-law toward each other (table 2). Items 6 to 10 of each the scales loaded as a single factor and was labeled as ‘Passive Relationship’ as the items reflected the passive relationship of mother-in-law or daughter-in-law toward each other i.e. how they perceive the relationship as a recipient from each other (table 2). The communalities for all the 10 items of both the scales ranged between .473 to .774 (table 3), thus acceptable as all were above 0.4 (Osborne et al., 2008). Item-Total and Item-Scale correlations for all the 10 items of each the scale were found highly significant at the 0.01 level (table 3). Items for SMILP and SDILP are reported in table 3. The Cronbach’s Alpha reliability for SMILP’s sub-scales i.e. Active Relationship ( $\alpha=.81$ ) and Passive Relationship ( $\alpha=.83$ ) was good (table 4). The Cronbach’s Alpha reliability for SDILP’s sub-scales i.e. Active Relationship ( $\alpha=.83$ ) and Passive Relationship ( $\alpha=.89$ ) was also good (table 4).

The study revealed that there was a significant inverse correlation between mother-in-law's education and mother-in-law's relationship with daughter-in-law (table 5;  $r = -.251$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ) i.e. the higher a mother-in-law is educated, the poorer her relationship with her daughter-in-law would be. The same result was further probed by a simple regression analysis (table 6) whereby education of mother-in-law strongly predicted a negative relationship with daughter-in-law ( $\beta = -.286$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Education was not significantly correlated in the similar context with the daughters-in-law (table 5). Age, on the other hand, had no significant correlation with the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law (table 5).

The levels of relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and possible differences in this regard were also measured. It was found that the level of the overall relationship of mother-in-law with daughter-in-law was 79.58%; the level of the Active Relationship of mother-in-law with daughter-in-law was 79.6%; and the level of the Passive Relationship of mother-in-law with daughter-in-law was 79.52% (table 4). The level of the overall relationship of daughter-in-law with mother-in-law was 77.06%; the level of the Active Relationship of daughter-in-law with mother-in-law was 78.2%; and the level of the Passive Relationship of daughter-in-law with mother-in-law was 75.92% (table 4). Further analysis revealed (table 7) that the Passive Relationship between daughters-in-law ( $M = 18.98$ ;  $SD = 5.16$ ) and mothers-in-law ( $M = 19.88$ ;  $SD = 4.24$ ) had a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ). It means that the daughters-in-law had a significantly different and poorer perception of their relationship with mothers-in-law as compared with mothers-in-law's similar perception about their relationship with daughters-in-law.

The differences in the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law based on their being housewives or working women revealed no significant differences (table 8).

## **DISCUSSION**

Women have been given a gender-based role to maintain relationships within their families (Euler et al., 2001; Jean Turner et al., 2006; Willson et al., 2003). After the marriage of their sons, the daughters-in-law become part of their families and tend to share this role with mothers-in-law (Willson et al., 2003). The sons get more attached with their wives as compared to their blood relatives (Morr Serewicz, 2008). The daughter-in-law becomes a bridge between the love of the son and his mother (Prentice, 2009) which puts her in a confrontation with her mother-in-law due to power dynamics within the family. Moreover, the daughter-in-law, along with her husband, remain more attached with the family of wife instead of being close to the husband's family (Datta et al., 2003; Fingerman, 2001; Timmer & Veroff, 2000). The mothers-in-law, therefore, develop a feeling that their sons would be detached from them by their daughters-in-law (Merrill, 2007). A folk saying quoted by Fischer (Fischer, 1983b) is, "a daughter is a daughter the rest of her life; a son is a son until he takes a wife". These feelings, however, are quite normal and temporary. Researchers have argued that mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law may get 'turning points' soon after they realize the importance of each other (Bolton, 1961; Graham, 1997). The first important turning point within this relationship is the birth of a baby which strengthens the family (Drew et al., 1998; Fischer, 1983a; Jean Turner et al., 2006). Mothers-in-law get happy by becoming grandmothers and get attached with their grandchildren (Breheeny et al., 2013; Gauthier, 2002). Daughters-in-law become mothers themselves and recognize the maternal feelings and responsibilities. Thus, the conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law get significantly reduced, especially in collectivistic Eastern cultures. As depicted by the findings of the current study, the situation between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is not as bad as all as portrayed by the media.

It is rather quite encouraging. The findings have revealed the positive nature of this relationship in the understudied culture. Mothers-in-law's relationship with their daughters-in-law was 80% positive. The same relationship was 77% positive for daughters-in-law. This is quite encouraging as compared with the studies conducted in Western cultures. Daughter, in Eastern cultures, are raised in such a way that teaches them to be obedient and submissive (Husain & Gulzar, 2015). People living in Eastern cultures, especially the women, are less aware of mental health related issues and rights (Husain & Faize, 2020). Moreover, they are not taught to disclose their psychosocial problems in a way which could damage their immediate relationships (Husain, 2018, 2019; Husain et al., 2016). The mothers-in-law, however, perceived their daughters-in-law more positively as compared with the perception of the daughters-in-law regarding them.

This finding is in align with earlier Western studies where daughters-in-law perceived the relationship with their mothers-in-law in a more negative and conflictual way as compared with mothers-in-law's relationship towards their daughters-in-law (Jean Turner et al., 2006; Rittenour, 2012; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009; Rittenour & Kellas, 2015). Another significant finding of the current study is the role of mother-in-law's education in her relationship with the daughter-in-law. The study has revealed that mothers-in-law with lesser education have more positive relationship with their daughters-in-law as compared to mothers-in-law with higher levels of education. This finding could also justify why the understudied relationship is less conflictual in Eastern cultures where mothers-in-law or women in general are not highly educated.

Apart from the novel findings from an Eastern culture; the study has also developed and validated two scales to profile the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Within these scales, the relationship is seen from two different, but relevant dimensions as discussed earlier i.e. active dimension of the relationship and passive dimension of the relationship. The future researchers are suggested to conduct similar studies from other Eastern cultures as there is a huge knowledge gap in this regard. They are also advised to analyze the role of childbirth and socioeconomic status in the understudied relationship, as the current study could not incorporate these interesting variables.

**Ethical Statement:**

All the procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Conflict of Interest:**

The authors have no conflict of interest with the publishing journal.

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**Originality:**

The authors state that the current study is original and has not been submitted anywhere else.

**Availability of the data:**

The author has uploaded the data along with this paper.

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ANNEXURES

Table 1: Reliability and Data Accuracy of Sukoon Mother-in-Law Profiler (SMILP) and Sukoon Daughter-in-Law Profiler (SDILP)

Scale	N	A	KMO	BTS	Components Extracted	Variance Explained (%)
SMILP	10	.875	.817	1012.99*	2	59.85
SDILP	10	.902	.865	1301.24*	2	65.73

N=Number of items; a= Cronbach's Alpha; KMO=Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sample Adequacy; BTS= Bartlett's Test of Sphericity; \*P=.000

Table 2: Factor Structure of Sukoon Mother-in-Law Profiler (SMILP) and Sukoon Daughter-in-Law Profiler (SDILP)

Item	SMILP Components		Item	SDILP Components	
	Active Relationship	Passive Relationship		Active Relationship	Passive Relationship
SMILP-1	.762		SDILP-1	.587	
SMILP-2	.619		SDILP-2	.785	
SMILP-3	.647		SDILP-3	.573	
SMILP-4	.654		SDILP-4	.821	
SMILP-5	.857		SDILP-5	.750	
SMILP-6		.834	SDILP-6		.833
SMILP-7		.624	SDILP-7		.844
SMILP-8		.777	SDILP-8		.714
SMILP-9		.632	SDILP-9		.821
SMILP-10		.776	SDILP-10		.739

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 3: Communalities, Total Item and Item Scale correlations for Sukoon Mother-in-Law Profiler (SMILP) and Sukoon Daughter-in-Law Profiler (SDILP)

Item No.	Item	Extraction	Total Item and Item Scale correlations		
			SMILP	Active Relationship	Passive Relationship
SMILP-1	میں اپنی بہووں کو اپنی بیٹیوں کی طرح پیار کرتی ہوں	.601	.632**	.739**	
SMILP-2	میں اپنی بہووں کا اپنی بیٹیوں کی طرح خیال رکھتی ہوں	.486	.681**	.763**	
SMILP-3	میں اپنی بہووں پر اپنی بیٹیوں کی طرح اعتماد کرتی ہوں	.616	.756**	.758**	
SMILP-4	میں اپنی بہووں کی اپنی بیٹیوں کی طرح مدد کرتی ہوں	.473	.626**	.725**	
SMILP-5	میں اپنی بہووں کی اپنی بیٹیوں کی طرح عزت کرتی ہوں	.757	.693**	.806**	
SMILP-6	میری بہوویں مجھے اپنی ماں کی طرح پیار کرتی ہیں	.707	.680**		.806**

SMILP-7	میری بہوویں میرا اپنی ماں کی طرح خیال رکھتی ہیں	.514	.675**	.733**	
SMILP-8	میری بہوویں مجھ پر اپنی ماں کی طرح اعتماد کرتی ہیں	.666	.743**	.808**	
SMILP-9	میری بہوویں میری ویسی ہی مدد کرتی ہیں جیسا کہ وہ اپنی ماں کی کرتی ہیں	.530	.689**	.747**	
SMILP-10	میری بہوویں میری ویسی ہی عزت کرتی ہیں جیسا کہ وہ اپنی ماں کی کرتی ہیں	.637	.689**	.784**	
<b>SDILP</b>			<b>SDILP</b>	<b>Active Relationship</b>	<b>Passive Relationship</b>
SDILP-1	میں اپنی ساس کو اپنی ماں کی طرح پیار کرتی ہوں	.485	.667**	.751**	
SDILP-2	میں اپنی ساس کا اپنی ماں کی طرح خیال رکھتی ہوں	.664	.680**	.780**	
SDILP-3	میں اپنی ساس پر اپنی ماں کی طرح اعتماد کرتی ہوں	.623	.781**	.803**	
SDILP-4	میں اپنی ساس کی اپنی ماں کی طرح مدد کرتی ہوں	.695	.645**	.762**	
SDILP-5	میں اپنی ساس کی اپنی ماں کی طرح عزت کرتی ہوں	.630	.674**	.772**	
SDILP-6	میری ساس مجھے میری ماں کی طرح پیار کرتی ہیں	.754	.795**	.880**	
SDILP-7	میری ساس میرا اپنی بیٹیوں کی طرح خیال رکھتی ہیں	.774	.799**	.849**	
SDILP-8	میری ساس مجھ پر اپنی بیٹیوں کی طرح اعتماد کرتی ہیں	.630	.772**	.831**	
SDILP-9	میری ساس میری ویسی ہی مدد کرتی ہیں جیسا کہ وہ اپنی بیٹیوں کی کرتی ہیں	.708	.744**	.824**	
SDILP-10	میری ساس میری ویسی ہی عزت کرتی ہیں جیسا کہ وہ اپنی بیٹیوں کی کرتی ہیں	.611	.731**	.802**	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4: Descriptive statistics and reliability of Sukoon Mother-in-Law Profiler (SMILP; N=217) and Sukoon Daughter-in-Law Profiler (SDILP; N=223)

Variable	Items	$\alpha$	M	SD	%	Range		Skewness	Kurtosis
						Potential	Actual		
SMILP	10	.875	39.79	7.57	79.58	5-50	10-50	-1.23	2.15
SMILP-AR	5	.813	19.90	4.21	79.6	5-25	5-25	-1.26	1.87
SMILP-PS	5	.834	19.88	4.24	79.52	5-25	5-25	-1.06	1.13
SDILP	10	.902	38.53	8.80	77.06	5-50	10-50	-1.084	.840
SDILP-AR	5	.830	19.55	4.55	78.2	5-25	5-25	-1.130	.971
SDILP-PR	5	.894	18.98	5.16	75.92	5-25	5-25	-1.041	.299

$\alpha$  =Cronbach's Alpha; M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation; AR=Active Relationship; PR=Passive Relationship



The Relationship between Mother-In-Law and Daughter-In-Law

Table 5: Correlations between the understudied variables

	Active Relationship	Passive Relationship	Age	Education	Years since DIL wedded
Relationship of MIL with DIL	.894**	.896**	.002	-.251**	
Active Relationship of MIL		.602**	.035	-.142*	
Passive Relationship of MIL			-.031	-.307**	
Relationship of DIL with MIL	.893**	.917**	-.060	.049	.073
Active Relationship of DIL		.640**	-.084	.131	.061
Passive Relationship of DIL			-.028	-.031	.070
Education of DIL					-.116

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); \* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

MIL=Mother-in-Law; DIL=Daughter-in-Law

Table 6: Summary of Simple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Mothers-in-Law</b>					
Age	.015	.036	.028	.418	.677
Education	-.454	.108	-.286	-4.187	.000
Profession	2.639	1.404	.128	1.880	.062
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.079			
<i>F</i>		6.06*			
<b>Daughters-in-Law</b>					
Age	-.111	.073	-.113	-1.530	.128
Education	.241	.246	.068	.979	.329
Profession	-.472	1.281	-.025	-.369	.713
Years since wedded	.125	.072	.129	1.728	.085
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.020			
<i>F</i>		1.096**			

\* *p*=.001; \*\* *p*=.359

Table 7: Differences in the relationships between Mothers-in-Law and Daughters-in-Law

Variable	Mothers-in-Law ( <i>n</i> = 217)		Daughters-in-Law ( <i>n</i> =223)		<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Overall Relationship	39.79	7.57	38.53	8.80	1.60	0.10	0.153
Active Relationship	19.90	4.21	19.55	4.55	.83	0.40	0.080
Passive Relationship	19.88	4.24	18.98	5.16	2.01	0.04	0.190

*Table 8: Differences in the relationships between housewives and working mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law*

	Housewives		Working		<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	M	SD	M	SD			
<b>Mothers-in-Law</b>							
Overall Relationship	39.62	7.71	40.71	6.84	.78	.43	0.144
Active Relationship	19.79	4.28	20.51	3.86	.92	.35	0.171
Passive Relationship	19.82	4.36	20.20	3.60	.47	.63	0.089
<b>Daughters-in-Law</b>							
Overall Relationship	38.58	9.59	38.44	7.09	.11	.91	0.016
Active Relationship	19.55	4.85	19.56	3.96	.02	.98	0.002
Passive Relationship	19.03	5.60	18.88	4.22	.20	.83	0.029

Mothers-in-Law= 182 Housewives & 35 working; Daughters-in-Law=147 Housewives & 76 working