



## Media Melodrama: Decoding the Impact of Soap Operas on Marital Concerns among Young Viewers

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the complex interaction between psychological factors, the fear of a bad marriage (FOBM), and the consumption of soap operas. While watching soap operas (WSD) is associated with FOBM, mediation studies show that these associations are not fully explained by perceived relationship handling competence (PAHR), perceived risk of mistreatment (PRM), or perceived severity of abuse (PGM). A possible desensitization effect, wherein soap opera viewers may perceive real-life threats as less severe, is suggested by the negative relationship found between PRM and FOBM. On the other hand, the positive correlation shown between FOBM and PGM suggests that watching soap operas increases one's awareness of the gravity of possible abuse. There may be a division in confidence in relationship management, as indicated by the non-significant correlation with PAHR. The distinctive influence of media consumption on marriage perspectives is highlighted by the direct effect of WSD on FOBM, even after controlling for mediators. This study highlights the need for a sophisticated knowledge of the psychological processes involved in media consumption and relationship issues, contributing to our understanding of how soap operas impact people's anxieties and expectations about romantic relationships. In summary, higher perceived danger, higher reported intensity of abuse, and weaker confidence in relationship management are all linked to increased worries about marital discontent.*

**Keywords:** Soap operas, Perceived risk of mistreatment in the relationship, Perceived ability to handle relationships, Perceived gravity of mistreatment, Fear of a bad marriage.

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of the media's influence on romantic relationships has become a popular topic in recent decades (Genner & Suss, 2016). The impact of media on people's thoughts and actions is well-known, although how exactly this happens is only sometimes clearly understood (Arias, 2016). The effect of media, especially soap operas, is an essential factor to consider because people have different views on love and marriage (Jackl, 2016) and because having unrealistic expectations can lead to dissatisfaction in a marriage (Demo & Ganong, 1994; Segrin & Nabi, 2002). Popular daytime television soap operas often portray happy married couples, which may shape viewers' views of being in a committed relationship (Kim & Oliver, 2006). Dramas like this, according to the cultivation hypothesis, help shape expectations by highlighting qualities like empathy, physical attractiveness, love at first sight, celebration, passion, and romantic closeness as necessary for a happy marriage (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). The plots of the most popular soap operas mix traditional and contemporary elements (Geraghty, 2005). While women's strength and power are strongly lauded, so are the values of joint families, the importance of the marital bond, sacrifice, tolerance, and patience. This harmony keeps it genuine for audiences of all ages. Most soap avoided experimental theme structures to ensure they can be financially supported. So, the fundamental subject keeps returning after a given narrative becomes economically successful. An example of this type of story started with a woman from a lower-class family marrying a man from a middle- or upper-class family in an urban setting because she feels pressured by her circumstances. Because of how things are set up, the girl has little choice but to conform to her husband and his family's demands and struggles. Contrarily, the boy's family members are depicted as kind, but they are pretty insensitive toward the girl because of the forced marriage to someone from a different background. Any type of abuse, whether verbal or psychological, directed at the newlywed woman would seem perfectly acceptable to the onlookers under these conditions. Furthermore, this story argues that a lady in this situation would be wise to exercise patience and tolerance without complaining. The narrative framework is set up in such a way that it is possible to show a newlywed woman being violently attacked without making her husband or in-laws look bad (Chanda & Chhotaray, 2018). Also, viewers don't find the violence too disturbing because there's always a generic reassurance that everything will work out. As the audience watches these violent plot points, their empathy for the victims of these crimes is diminished by their general knowledge of good, ultimately triumphing over evil. Soap opera violence often involves the apparent or implied use of force that damages people, their possessions, or their reputation (Megargee, 1982). Shows like these typically showcase the power of women while also extolling traditional and modern values like joint families, the importance of marriage, sacrifice, tolerance, and patience (Bilandzic & Buselle, 2012). Nevertheless, there are instances where this narrative structure unintentionally supports harmful portrayals of violence against women, normalizing abuse and promoting a lack of complaint (Chanda & Chhotaray, 2018).

## OBJECTIVE

To understand the complex links between romantic relationships, media exposure, relational expectancies, and real-life experiences.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The effects of media socialization on individuals' identities, social networks, education, sexual behaviors, prosocial behaviors, aggressive tendencies, and stereotypes are far-reaching and complex (Prot et al., 2014). This highlights the media's power as a socializing agent, shaping excellent and bad results. For instance, by portraying women in an excessively caring and altruistic light, Pakistani operas reinforce damaging gender norms (Kottehari, 2019). Culturally and socially unique ideas about femininity are promoted as positive traits in Pakistani television dramas, but non-conformist traits are portrayed negatively (Qamar & Farrukh, 2021). According to Abbas (2018), Pakistani television shows perpetuate patriarchal norms, show women in a negative light, and restrict chances for women to be independent and empowered. When seen through the lens of family life, soap operas' portrayal of women as invisible in the workplace may mirror long-held assumptions and help perpetuate harmful norms (Carmona & Godoy, 2008). The portrayal of violence in the dramas is examined portrayal of psychological abuse against women (Zaheen, Safdar, & Riaz, 2021).

The majority of psychological abuse occurs within the home and is committed by male relatives, according to the report's findings (ibid). Characters in Pakistani drama serials which are violent or victimized are examined in terms of the status they are given and the status they gain. Using data from five PTV serials shown over a quarter, this study calculates the percentage of violent scenes involving 1,060 characters. Male perpetrators and female victims of violence are both ascribed statuses, according to the research. This can be because the perpetrators have familial ties to the victims. As a result, the findings provide light on the dynamics and obligations placed on characters by demonstrating that much of psychological violence occurs in domestic contexts and is done by male blood members. Recognizing the interconnectedness of culture and media, especially television (Ju, 2020) is critical. According to Atay & Gorton (2022) romantic relationships seen on television reflect and reinforce societal standards, which in turn help shape cultural norms and expectations.

Individuals' idealization of romantic relationships is influenced by how they see television characters (Custers & Bulck, 2011). Further, research has linked viewing crime shows to an increased sense of danger, which may explain why some people experience an irrational fear of criminals (Custers & Bulck, 2011). Media exposure, risk perception, coping ability, and fear are all interconnected, and the fear of harm is thought to originate from either an exaggerated perception of danger or a lack of personal resources to deal with stressful situations.

Among the many negative consequences of domestic violence, research has revealed that spouses may experience higher anxiety, increased sexual activity, and depressed symptoms (DeMaris, 1997). The power dynamics in marriage and other relationships are a common issue in Korean soap operas as well, which typically emphasize the positive and negative aspects of relationships and occasionally even condone little acts of physical violence (Lee, Hahm, & Universit, 2013). This is similar to the way that Pakistani dramas portray the dynamics of romantic relationships.

Finally, the literature study highlights how media, especially soap operas, influence how people see marriage and love relationships. When trying to make sense of the intricate interaction dynamics between media and TV, it's essential to keep in mind recurring themes like the promotion of harmful gender stereotypes, the normalization of violent behavior, and the development of unreasonable expectations. Expanding on this theme, the following sections will delve into empirical evidence and analyses that shed light on the complex links between romantic relationships, media exposure, relational expectancies, and real-life experiences.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The majority of research on the effects of media is carried out within the framework of one of two major theories: the cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 2002) or the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1994). It is possible, according to social cognitive theory, for individuals to purposefully monitor media depictions of acts in romantic relationships in order to get insight into how they might behave in their own relationships. According to Bandura (1986, 1994), studies have shown that people tend to commit to memory acts that they have witnessed, with the intention of using those activities as models for their own behavior in the future. Observed behaviors are more likely to be modelled if they are performed by attractive individuals and the outcomes are particularly appealing (Bandura, 1994). This means that if an observed behavior results in a desired outcome, adolescents may engage in similar behavior believing that they will reap the same benefits as the observed behavior. Teenagers who model their own behavior after those seen in the media are unlikely to achieve the desired outcomes that are observed. This is due to the fact that the media typically promotes unrealistic views of relationships. Unlike the social cognitive theory, which argues that adolescents actively engage with media, the cultivation hypothesis suggests that the impact of media messages may be more passive. This is in contrast to the social cognitive theory, which suggests that adolescents. According to Gerbner et al. (1994), television has become the primary medium through which a heterogeneous population obtains information and engages in socializing during their daily lives. It does this by employing recurring themes and imagery, which in turn shapes the viewer's perceptions of reality. In other words, viewers who are exposed to media depictions of reality over an extended period of time may acquire perspectives that are compatible with these portrayals. Exposure to a wide variety of media content is said to have an effect on one's impressions of the real world, according to the traditional cultivation hypothesis.

Recent study, on the other hand, suggests that content that is specific to a certain genre of media has a higher influence on viewers than content that is more general in nature (for example, Holmes, 2007; Roessler & Brosius, 2001). Therefore, according to this revised hypothesis, viewers who are exposed to a significant number of media that focuses on romantic relationships will create perspectives and expectations regarding romantic relationships that are consistent with the portrayal of those relationships in the media.

When it comes to personal relationships, the media has a significant impact on how people see and anticipate things in today's culture. No studies have examined how viewing soap operas affects people's views of committed relationships, even though previous studies have shown that media can affect relationship dynamics. The effects of watching these soap operas, which often deal with dark and disturbing themes, on viewers, especially young ones, have not been thoroughly investigated. The pervasiveness of this type of media and its possible effects on people's views on marriage highlights the importance of filling this void. Soap operas, especially those that show the darker side of marriage, may influence viewers' opinions and make them nervous about it (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2013). This is why research into this topic is urgently needed.

This study seeks to examine how viewing soap operas influences people's views of romantic relationships, particularly in connection to the possible effects of being exposed to depressing themes in these media stories. The main goal is to figure out how viewers' views on marriage are impacted by what they see on soap operas, especially the more negative parts of marriage. The research aims to add to what is already known about the interaction dynamics between media and society by investigating this impact. The research also aims to help scholars, writers, and producers create more thoughtful and responsible media by giving them a better grasp of the ramifications of this type of content. The study's overarching goal is to help fill gaps in our knowledge on how media use affects how young people, in particular, view serious relationships.

Given the identified research gap and the need to investigate the nuanced influence of soap operas on perceptions of conjugal relationships, this study proposes the following hypotheses that delve into the specific mechanisms by which exposure to morbid themes within these media narratives may influence individuals' attitudes toward marital life.

### **STUDY HYPOTHESIS:**

*H1: There is a positive association between watching soap dramas (WSD) and fear of a bad marriage (FOBM).*

H2: This association is mediated by perceived risk of mistreatment (PRM), perceived gravity of mistreatment (PGM), and perceived ability to handle relationships (PAHR).

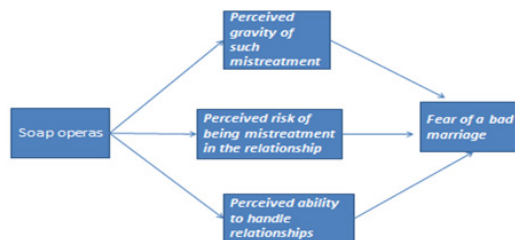
## SIGNIFICANCE

This research fills a gap in our knowledge by examining how viewing soap operas affects viewers' views of committed relationships, illuminating a hitherto unexplored area of media and relationship dynamics. This study sheds light on the possible effects of watching soap operas, which will be useful for future studies that aim to dissect the complex relationship between media portrayals of marriage and viewers' sentiments toward the institution.

The results of this study fill a significant knowledge vacuum by investigating how viewers of morbid soap operas see marriage. While previous studies have shown that media portrayals of relationships can shape viewers' expectations, few have examined the negative consequences of soap operas, especially those that highlight the less positive sides of marital relationships. To fill this void, this study offers a fresh viewpoint on the complex interaction between media consumption and attitudes by exploring how such information could influence views and add to worries about marriage.

The results of this study also have real-world consequences for those working as entertainment industry writers and producers. Based on the findings, content makers should be careful when making and showing shows that could influence viewers' views of married life. Crafting compelling content while being mindful of its potential influence on young brains is crucial for responsible media creation and this understanding can help with that.

### Multiple Mediation Model



## METHODOLOGY

### Sample Size

Regarding the current study, the researcher obtained the necessary data from the sample population using the convenience sampling technique and non-probability sampling method. Using the Cochran approach, the researcher determined the sample size when the population was infinite. Since the population of drama viewers in Lahore was assumed to be limitless, a convenience sample spanning the entire city was selected. Cochran designed a method for measuring a representative

sample of proportions (1977).

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

e	Margin of error
p	Population proportion
z	Use Z Table

Where z (1.96 standardized value) is the target confidence level, p is the population's approximate percentage of a characteristic,  $q=1-p$ , and e is the accuracy level. The researcher wants to calculate the sample size of a vast, unknown-variability population. If the maximum variability is 50% ( $p=0.5$ ) and 95 percent confidence with 5% accuracy, the appropriate sample size equals.

$$p = 0.5, q = 1-0.5 = 0.5, e = 0.05, z = 1.96.$$

$$n_0 = (1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5) = 384.16 = 384 (0.05)^{-2}$$

The minimal sample size is 384. The participants that form the sample of the study was 490. The data was gathered online by means of google forms from the university students of Lahore by posting the form link on social media platforms including Facebook and WhatsApp groups.

The study variables in addition to the demographic variables (age, gender, education, income, and dwelling) the frequency of watching soap dramas four psychological constructs is used in this study. The conceptualization and operationalization of these are as follows:

### **Mistreatment Perceived Risk (PRM):**

People's subjective evaluation of the possibility and possible harm of mistreatment in a marriage is known as psychological risk assessment (PRM).

A question: "After getting married, how likely do you think it is that the following things might happen to you?" with six items was asked. Respondents were to rate their perceived risk of mistreatment regarding the six scenarios including: to financial coercion, humiliation, bodily harm, defamation, emotional/psychological torture, and forced to earn using a Likert scale option, which go from "very low chance" to "very high chance."

### **Mistreatment's Perceived Gravity (PGM):**

PGM is the subjective assessment of people's level of seriousness or severity related to hypothetical situations of abuse in a married relationship.

How serious would you rate the mistreatment could be? Respondents rank the perceived seriousness of mistreatment incidents, such as forced earnings, financial coercion, physical injury, humiliation, slander, and emotional/psychological torment, using a Likert scale from "not very serious" to "very serious."

### Perceived Relationship Management Proficiency (PAHR):

PAHR represents people's perceptions of competence and ability to deal with various problems in a married relationship.

How well or how badly do you think you can deal with if you were involved in the following situations? Respondents describe their perceived capacity to manage financial coercion, humiliation, physical injury, defamation, emotional/psychological torture, and forced wages in a married setting using Likert scale replies ranging from "very bad" to "very well".

### Fear of Bad Marriage (FOBM):

FOBM describes people's worry or unease about the general state and possible negative consequences of a marriage.

When you think about your future married life, how often have you worried that your in-laws or spouse would do any of the following to you? The six-item question seeks to ascertain the frequency with which respondents fear mistreatment by their future spouse or in-laws. The items pertain to forced earnings in the context of marriage, financial coercion, humiliation, physical harm, defamation, and emotional/psychological torture. Respondents are asked to choose from a range of Likert scale from "Never" to "(Almost) every day."

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The demographics of the 460 study participants are shown in table 1. The participant gender distribution is 70% male and 30% female. Most members (80.9%) are single, while 19.1% are married. Educational backgrounds vary, with 31.5% having a Bachelor's degree (BS), 50.4% an MS, and 18% a postgraduate degree above MS. The age distribution shows that 60% of participants are 25 or younger, 36.7% are 26–35, and 3.3% are above 35. Regarding family background, 33% are rural, and 67% are urban. Family monthly income shows members' different financial origins. 23.8% earn at least Rs. 25,000 each month, 33.9% Rs. 50,000, 15% Rs. 75,000, 11.7% Rs. 100,000, and 15.6% Rs. 1 lac. Only 1.3% did not report their monthly income. The sample is diverse in gender, marital status, education, age, family background, and monthly income, reflecting a broad demographic representation.

**Table 1: Demographic Features of Study (N = 460)**

	Characteristics	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	322	70
	Female	138	30
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	88	19.1



	Unmarried	372	80.9
<b>Education</b>	Bachelors (BS)	145	31.5
	Masters	232	50.4
	MPhil or above	083	18.00
<b>Age</b>	25 years or less	276	60.00
	26-35 years	169	36.7
	Above-35 years	15	3.3
<b>Family background</b>	Rural	152	33
	Urban	308	67
<b>Family Monthly income</b>	≥Rs. 25000	108	23.8
	≥Rs. 50000	154	33.9
	≥Rs. 75000	068	15.0
	≥Rs. 100000	053	11.7
	Above 1-Lac	071	15.6

Table 2: Validity, Reliability, and Correlational statistics of the Study Constructs

	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	MSV	Max - R(H)	$\alpha$	PRM	PGM	PAHR	FOBM	WSD
<b>PRM</b>	2.64	0.98	0.845	0.479	0.411	0.856	.840	<b>.692</b>				
<b>PGM</b>	3.85	0.70	0.875	0.543	0.239	0.894	.867	-.452**	<b>.736</b>			
<b>PAHR</b>	3.86	0.48	0.903	0.609	0.035	0.912	.902	-0.024	0.123	<b>.780</b>		
<b>FOBM</b>	3.82	0.68	0.856	0.502	0.411	0.867	.845	-.508**	.428**	.135*	<b>.708</b>	
<b>WSD</b>	3.42	0.67	-	-	-	-	-	-.453**	.514**	.085	.506**	1

NOTE: Perceived risk of mistreatment in the relationship PRM; Perceived gravity of mistreatment PGM; Perceived ability to handle relationships PAHR; Fear of a bad marriage FOBM; Watching Soap Dramas WSD.

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

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

Significant details about the validity, reliability, and correlations between our study measures are provided in Table 2, which includes essential information on their quality. We assess the effectiveness of our questions in measuring each concept by analyzing convergent validity. This helps us determine if the items within each category are consistent. Fear of a Bad Marriage (FOBM), for example, has a convergent validity score of 0.502, indicating moderate consistency among the items linked to this theme. The Perceived Gravity of Mistreatment (PGM) and Perceived Ability to Handle Relationships (PAHR) exhibit a significant level of convergent validity, indicating a strong correlation between the two variables.

The CR scores indicate the reliability of our inquiries. The high CR ratings, precisely 0.856 for FOBM and 0.903 for PAHR indicate the reliability and consistent measurement of the intended concepts through the questions. If you were to answer

the same set of questions multiple times, you would most likely give the same responses.

Our questions demonstrate reliability and validity in assessing the intended criteria based on the available data. Furthermore, it is worth examining how various factors, such as concerns about an unsatisfactory marriage, affect individuals' perceptions of mistreatment and self-assurance in managing relationships. These findings contribute to a deeper comprehension of the relationship between these critical variables.

The data presented in Table 2 offers a concise overview of our study variables' central tendency and variability. Participants express a moderate concern about potential mistreatment in relationships, as indicated by the average perceived risk of mistreatment ( $M= 2.64$ ). The standard deviation of 0.98 indicates variability in participants' responses, suggesting that individual perceptions differ around this average.

The study found that participants generally reported significant mistreatment in their relationships, with an average score of 3.85. The slight standard deviation of 0.70 indicates a reduced range of responses, implying a consistent perception of mistreatment severity among participants.

The participants generally displayed strong confidence in their relationship management skills, with an average rating of 3.86. The slight standard deviation of 0.48 suggests a limited range of variability, indicating that most participants have a similar level of confidence in relationship management.

The average level of concern regarding a harmful marriage is moderate ( $M= 3.82$ ), suggesting a general but not excessive level of fear. The observed standard deviation of 0.68 indicates a certain degree of variability, implying differences in fear levels among individuals about the average.

The average level of participant engagement in watching soap dramas is moderate, with a mean score of 3.42. The observed standard deviation of 0.67 indicates a certain level of variability, implying differences in individual watching habits around the mean.

Overall, participants generally display moderate levels of concern regarding mistreatment and fear of a bad marriage while also expressing a strong sense of confidence in their ability to handle relationships. The range of responses offers valuable insights into the wide array of perspectives held by individuals within these constructs. The correlation in the Table 2 provides valuable insights into how different variables in our study relate to each other. Let's break down these correlations in a way that's easy to understand.

It is worth noting the correlation between Perceived Risk of Mistreatment in the Relationship (PRM) and Perceived Gravity of Mistreatment (PGM). The data reveals a significant negative correlation ( $r = -.452^{**}$ ), suggesting that as the perceived

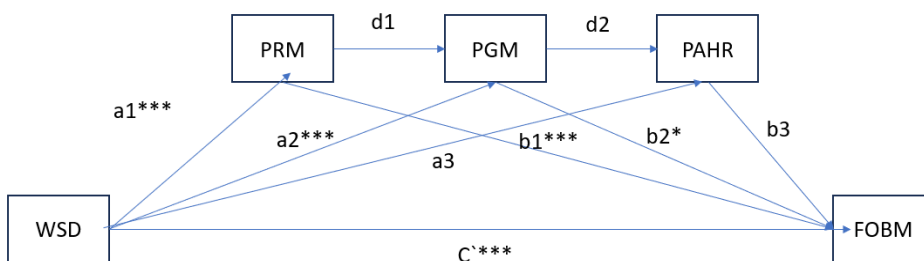
risk of mistreatment rises, the perception of mistreatment declines. It may appear paradoxical, but it indicates that having greater expectations of mistreatment can result in a more discerning evaluation of real mistreatment.

Turning our attention to the relationship between Fear of a Bad Marriage (FOBM) and other variables, we observe noteworthy negative associations. There is a significant correlation between FOBM and both PRM ( $r = -.508^{**}$ ) and PGM ( $r = .428^{**}$ ). This indicates that individuals who have concerns about a negative marriage tend to perceive a greater likelihood and seriousness of mistreatment. Furthermore, there is a significant positive correlation ( $r = .506^{**}$ ) between the fear of a bad marriage (FOBM) and the habit of watching soap dramas (WSD). This suggests that individuals who have concerns about their marital prospects are more likely to engage in the consumption of soap dramas.

While examining Perceived Ability to Handle Relationships (PAHR), it becomes apparent that there is a weak and non-significant correlation with other variables. This indicates that an individual's confidence in managing relationships is relatively unaffected by their perception of risk or fear of mistreatment.

In simpler terms, these correlations help us understand how different aspects of our study are connected. As an illustration, individuals who express worry about their marital relationship tend to be more inclined to interpret mistreatment and engage in the consumption of soap operas. Nevertheless, their ability to navigate interpersonal connections does not appear to be significantly impacted by these considerations. The findings presented here enhance our understanding of the interconnections among these significant variables.

Process Hayes Model 6 was used to understand the factors influencing the fear of bad marriage among the young viewers. Individual effects of the entire psychological variable are as follows:



**Figure 1 Regression Model (Process Hayes Model 6) for effect of watching soap dramas (WSD) on the fear of bad marriage (FOBM) with three mediators PRM, PGM, AND PAHR.**

**Table 3: Regression Analysis Summary for predicting Fear of Bad Marriage**

<b>IV to Mediators (a paths)</b>	$\beta$	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Perceived risk of mistreatment	-.6701	.0886	-7.5598	.000	-.8447	-.4954
Perceived gravity of mistreatment	.3979	.0650	6.1241	.000	.2698	.5259
Perceived ability to handle relationships	.0670	.0542	1.2364	.217	-.0398	.1739

<b>Direct Effects of Mediators on DV (b paths)</b>	$\beta$	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Perceived risk of mistreatment	-.2209	.0436	-5.0675	.000	-.3068	-.1350
Perceived gravity of mistreatment	.1217	.0643	1.8920	.059	-.0051	.2486
Perceived ability to handle relationships	.1248	.0771	1.6188	.107	-.0271	.2766

<b>Total Effect of IV on DV (c path)</b>	$\beta$	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Watching Soap Dramas	.5183	.0595	8.7125	.000		

<b>Direct Effect of IV on DV (c' path)</b>	$\beta$	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Watching Soap Dramas	.2973	.0670	4.4410	.000	.1654	.4293

<b>Model Summary for DV Model</b>						
R	R-sq	Adj R-sq	F	df1	df2	p
.6111	.3735	.3620	32.4866	4.000	218.000	.000

The regression model was statistically significant,  $F(1, 221) = 57.15$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating its overall explanatory power. The model explained approximately 20.55% of the variance in perceived risk of mistreatment. The predictor variable, watching soap dramas (WSD), significantly predicted perceived risk of mistreatment ( $\beta = -.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This implies that an increase in watching soap dramas is associated with a decrease in the perceived risk of mistreatment. The negative coefficient suggests a potential protective effect, where those who engage more in soap dramas perceive lower risks of mistreatment in their relationships.

For the perceived ability to handle relationships, the model was statistically nonsignificant,  $F(2, 220) = 0.83$ ,  $p = .4385$ , and explained only 0.75% of the variance. None of the predictor variables, including perceived risk of mistreatment and watching soap dramas, significantly predicted perceived ability to handle relationships (all  $p > .05$ ). This implies that watching soap dramas and perceived risk of mistreatment may not directly influence individuals' confidence in handling relationships.

The regression model for perceived gravity of mistreatment (Model 6) was statistically significant,  $F(3, 219) = 36.25, p < .001$ , explaining approximately 33.18% of the variance. Among the predictor variables, perceived risk of mistreatment ( $\beta = -.20, p < .001$ ), perceived ability to handle relationships ( $\beta = .12, p = .129$ ), and watching soap dramas ( $\beta = .40, p < .001$ ) significantly predicted perceived gravity of mistreatment. This indicates that those who perceive higher risks of mistreatment, have greater confidence in handling relationships, and engage more in watching soap dramas tend to perceive mistreatment as more severe.

The model predicting fear of a bad marriage (FM) was statistically significant,  $F(4, 218) = 32.49, p < .001$ , explaining approximately 37.35% of the variance. Perceived risk of mistreatment ( $\beta = -.22, p < .001$ ), perceived ability to handle relationships ( $\beta = .12, p = .107$ ), perceived gravity of mistreatment ( $\beta = .12, p = .060$ ), and watching soap dramas ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ) significantly predicted fear of a bad marriage. The negative coefficient for perceived risk of mistreatment suggests that those who perceive higher risks of mistreatment tend to have lower fear of a bad marriage. On the other hand, greater confidence in handling relationships, perceiving mistreatment as more severe, and increased engagement in watching soap dramas are associated with higher levels of fear of a bad marriage.

The direct effect of watching soap dramas on fear of a bad marriage was statistically significant ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ). Additionally, several indirect effects through perceived risk of mistreatment, perceived ability to handle relationships, and perceived gravity of mistreatment were observed. Notably, the total indirect effect was significant, indicating that the influence of watching soap dramas on fear of a bad marriage is, in part, mediated by these psychological factors.

In summary, the results suggest that watching soap dramas is associated with perceptions and concerns related to mistreatment in relationships, influencing the fear of a bad marriage. The protective effect observed in the perceived risk of mistreatment, coupled with the mediating roles of perceived ability to handle relationships and perceived gravity of mistreatment, underscores the complex interplay of media consumption and psychological factors in shaping individuals' attitudes towards marital outcomes. This supports the hypothesis that watching soap dramas can have an influence on this outcome by mediating various psychological factors.

We looked at the routes that led from the independent variable (IV), watching soap operas, to the mediators. A substantial negative correlation was found between the perceived risk of mistreatment and the amount of soap operas watched ( $\beta = -.6701, p < .001$ ). This suggests that viewing more soap operas is associated with a lower perceived risk of mistreatment. A noteworthy positive correlation was seen between Perceived Gravity of Mistreatment and higher engagement in soap dramas ( $\beta = .3979, p < .001$ ), indicating that a stronger sense of the severity of mistreatment is linked to it. There was no significant correlation found between perceived ability to handle relationships and  $\beta = .0670, p = .217$ .

Next, we looked at the mediators' direct influence on the dependent variable (DV), fear of a bad marriage. Higher perceived risks of mistreatment are linked to lower levels of dread of a terrible marriage, according to the substantial negative direct effect of perceived risk of mistreatment ( $\beta = -.2209$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The study found a marginally significant positive direct impact ( $\beta = .1217$ ,  $p = .059$ ) for perceived gravity of abuse, indicating a correlation between greater levels of anxiety of a bad marriage and perceived gravity of mistreatment. There was no significant direct influence found for perceived ability to handle relationships ( $\beta = .1248$ ,  $p = .107$ ). According to the strong overall effect found in the c route (IV Effect on DV) ( $\beta = .5183$ ,  $p < .001$ ), there is a general relationship between watching soap operas and fear of a bad marriage, which may be deduced from the depiction of an unpleasant marriage in such shows.

Even after controlling for the mediators, there remained a substantial direct effect of watching soap operas on the fear of a disastrous marriage ( $\beta = .2973$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that the effects of watching soap operas on this anxiety do not go away. This finding supports the direct impact of IV on DV (c' route).

The regression model for the fear of a bad marriage explained around 37.35% of the variation, and the DV Model Summary Model was determined to be statistically significant with  $F(4, 218) = 32.49$  and  $p < .001$ . The high F-value validates the overall statistical significance of the model, which supports the hypothesis that perceptions of risk of mistreatment, perceived ability to handle relationships, perceived gravity of mistreatment, and viewing soap operas all play a significant role in predicting the fear of a bad marriage.

## DISCUSSION

There is a clear correlation between watching soap dramas (WSD) and fear of a bad marriage (FOBM), indicating that individuals who watch more soap dramas tend to have a greater concern about the quality of their marital relationships. Nevertheless, the mediation analysis indicates that the connection is not completely elucidated by factors such as perceived risk of mistreatment (PRM), perceived gravity of mistreatment (PGM), or perceived ability to handle relationships (PAHR). It can be inferred that the consumption of soap dramas contributes to the fear of a bad marriage. However, the psychological processes that underlie this connection are intricate and may involve other factors that were not taken into account in our study. The negative association between the Perceived Risk of Mistreatment and Fear of Bad Marriage (FOBM) is curious. One possible explanation is that those who spend more time watching soap operas may become desensitized to perceived risks in relationships. Viewers may perceive real-life threats as less severe after being exposed to dramatic and exaggerated scenes on television. On the other hand, individuals who watch soap operas could take a more critical and analytical attitude, distinguishing between fictional and real-life threats, resulting in lower levels of worry about marriage.

The positive relationship between FOBM and the Perceived Gravity of mistreatment supports the idea that continuous exposure to dramatic portrayals of abuse in soap

operas can contribute to a higher sense of the severity of similar difficulties in real-life relationships. Viewers may absorb the dramatic depictions, increasing their sensitivity to the seriousness of possible mistreatment (Zeeshan, Safdar, & Riaz 2021; Lee, Hahm, & Universit 2013). Soap operas' narrative emphasis on acute and severe interpersonal issues may contribute to increased anxieties about the potential negative features of marriage as indicated by the study of Qamar & Farrukh (2021). The non-significant link between Perceived Ability to Handle Relationships and FOBM shows that viewing soap operas may not impact one's confidence in handling relationships. People may classify their perceived capacity to negotiate relationships to maintain them relatively independent of the exaggerated events depicted in soap operas. Other personal factors or experiences may be more influential in shaping people's confidence in managing relationships.

Even after controlling for mediators, the direct effect of watching soap operas on FOBM emphasizes the independent influence of soap opera consumption on the fear of a disastrous marriage. Soap operas frequently promote idealized or exaggerated depictions of love relationships, contributing to elevated expectations or fears about marriage (Atay & Gorton 2022; Custers & Bulck 2011). The persistence of the direct effect shows that the influence of soap operas on FOBM is not fully explained by mediated pathways but rather involves a direct psychological impact. In conclusion, viewing soap operas has a multifaceted effect on how people perceive marriage. While watching soap operas may reduce the perceived likelihood of mistreatment, it also increases the perceived gravity of prospective mistreatment. The non-significant influence of perceived capacity to manage relationships suggests that confidence in relationship management is compartmentalized (Abbas 2018). Even when mediators are considered, the direct effect of watching soap operas on FOBM underscores the unique impact of media consumption on influencing marriage perspectives. As a type of entertainment, soap operas add to individuals' socio-psychological landscapes, shaping their worries and expectations about marriage (Bilandzic & Buselle, 2012). The interaction of these variables emphasizes the importance of developing a more sophisticated knowledge of how media intake interacts with individual views and concerns about romantic relationships (Custers & Bulck 2011; Atay & Gorton 2022).

## **CONCLUSION**

Ultimately, our study has revealed the complex connection between viewing soap operas, psychological variables, and the apprehension surrounding marital dissatisfaction. Research suggests a correlation between increased consumption of soap dramas and heightened concerns regarding marital satisfaction. This fear is closely linked to perceptions of mistreatment, the severity of mistreatment, and confidence in managing relationships.

The findings provide some support for the notion that watching soap operas may contribute to individuals' concerns about the quality of their marital relationships. Nevertheless, the mediation analysis indicated that the connection is not solely accounted for by the perception of mistreatment risk, the perception of mistreatment severity, or the perception of relationship management abilities. The intricate

nature of this issue highlights the importance of gaining a deeper comprehension of the psychological processes involved when individuals' concerns about their relationships intersect with their consumption of media.

Significantly, our study revealed that the apprehension of a bad marital marriage is inversely related to the perceived competence in managing relationships, while being directly associated with the perceived likelihood and severity of mistreatment. It can be inferred that individuals with heightened fears have lower confidence in their ability to manage their relationships and perceive a higher level of risk and severity of mistreatment in their relationships.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The implications of these findings are relevant for researchers and practitioners in the fields of media psychology and relationship counseling. The study highlights the importance of conducting thorough examinations of media consumption's content and themes, which can impact individuals' concerns regarding their marriages. Further investigation is needed to examine other factors that could influence or modify these connections, in order to gain a more comprehensive comprehension.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Although our study offers valuable insights, it does have certain limitations. The cross-sectional design limits our capacity to establish causal relationships. Furthermore, it is important to consider that the self-report nature of the measures could potentially introduce response bias.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Further investigation may explore soap dramas' precise content and themes that contribute to the observed associations. Longitudinal studies offer a comprehensive perspective on the impact of media exposure on psychological well-being. Further investigation into potential variables influencing or impacting these relationships could provide a more thorough understanding.

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