

## **A Comparative Study of Presumptive Stressful Life Events on Marital Status and Gender**

**Kanchan Singh**

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Bhagalpur National College, Bhagalpur (TMBU)

**Abstract:** The institution of marriage is considered as the sacred collaboration not only between two people but two different families. In a hindu majority population marriage is a binding for whole life and separation by any religious rule or custom is not mentioned anywhere, so society is also not accepting the failure of marriage easily. Unfortunately, if a person is facing divorce, this is affecting him/her in many ways. To assess the impact of marital status on the level of stress among men and women a total of 100 participants was chosen for the study. In the 2x2 factorial research design stratification was based on two strata, marital status (married and divorced) and gender (male and female). In every cell of the sample there were 25 participants selected by purposive sampling technique. The Presumptive stressful life Event Scale[1] was used to determine the level of stress among the participants. The data analysis shows that the stress among the married women is higher than married men but divorced men are shown more presumptive stress than divorced women. The two-way ANOVA has been revealed that the impact of gender and marital status together plays a significant role in producing such stress.

**Keywords:** Presumptive stressful life event, Marital status, Gender

### **Introduction**

In the contemporary era, psychological stress has emerged as a pervasive multi-dimensional phenomenon, deeply associated with rapid socio-economic transitions, urbanization, and shifting cultural paradigms. Within psychological literature, life events—both normative and non-normative—are recognized as primary triggering factors that disrupt an individual's mental health, social life, re-adaptation and coping skills. While early stress models predominantly relied on Western metrics of life change units, the cultural variance in emotional cognitive appraisal demands region-specific assessments. In the Indian socio-cultural matrix, where collective family structures, deep-rooted community expectations, and traditional institutional frameworks dictate personal life scripts, the impact of life events carries unique psychological weight. Consequently, understanding the prevalence and intensity of stress requires tools to identify these indigenous realities, such as the Presumptive Stressful Life Events Scale (PSLES), which captures the specific nuances of the Indian population.

The marriage institution in India is traditionally viewed not merely as a legal or personal contract between two individuals, but as a sacred, lifelong socio-familial alliance that integrates two extended family networks. Because of this profound structural integration, any disruption to marital stability—such as formal separation or divorce represents a critical life event with severe psychological repercussions. Although urbanization and shifting economic independence have led to a gradual rise in marital dissolution rates across urban and semi-urban India, the socio-cultural stigma associated with divorce remains intensely pronounced. Consequently, individuals navigating divorce are often subjected to a compounding web of stressors, ranging from legal battles and financial fragmentation to severe social ostracization, loneliness, and the abrupt loss of a primary emotional support system.

The psychological manifestation of marital distress and life stress is significantly moderated by gender dynamics within the Indian subcontinent. Traditional gender roles often expose men and women to distinct categories of presumptive stress. Divorced women in India frequently

encounter heightened vulnerability due to deep-seated patriarchy, social judgment, moral policing, and potential economic dependence, which amplifies their socio-cultural and interpersonal stress scores. Conversely, divorced men often grapple with unique institutional and systemic stressors, including intense financial obligations (such as alimony or legal costs), property disputes, reduced access to domestic support, and a societal expectation to suppress emotional vulnerability, which frequently culminates in internalized burnout and unaddressed psychological strain.

Despite the escalating relevance of marital status as a significant determinant of mental health in modern India, empirical literature directly comparing the presumptive life stress profiles of married and divorced individuals—particularly across genders in semi-urban and transitioning urban landscapes—remains fragmented. Most existing Indian studies focus broadly on occupational burnout or general anxiety within a specific demographic group, leaving a critical gap in understanding how marital status interacts with gender to alter the baseline frequency and perception of life stress events. The present study aims to bridge this empirical gap by utilizing the 51-item Presumptive Stressful Life Events Scale (PSLES) to systematically evaluate, analyse, and compare the severity and domains of life stress among married and divorced males and females, to provide a critical insight for contemporary counselling, clinical intervention, and family welfare frameworks.

### **Review of Literature**

In the domain of psychological assessment within India, quantifying life event stress requires psychometric tools that align with regional cultural dynamics. The Presumptive Stressful Life Events Scale (PSLES) was specifically developed to bridge this gap, measuring stress accumulated over the past year as well as across an individual's[1]. Foundational validation studies of the PSLES noted an interesting pattern: when evaluating the scale as a whole, overall cumulative stress scores did not show a sweeping statistical difference between men and women[2]. However, marked sex differences emerged when looking at specific, individual life events, where women consistently perceived certain items as significantly more distressing[3]. Despite this, contemporary researchers have raised critiques regarding the scale's sensitivity, suggesting that a standardized checklist might occasionally overlook the highly nuanced, unique socio-cultural and everyday structural challenges faced by Indian women[4].

Beyond the foundational framework of the scale, broader literature and clinical applications consistently demonstrate that men and women perceive and navigate stressful life events through distinctly different lenses. Empirical evidence shows that women generally report higher exposure to, and sharper distress from, interpersonal and family-related stressors. Family conflicts, marital discord, and domestic disruption are often appraised by female participants as highly negative and less controllable. On the contrary, male participants frequently exhibit higher baseline stress or more frequent exposure within work-related, financial, and legal domains[5]. While global meta-analyses support this gendered division of stress appraisal with small-to-moderate effect sizes, the pattern highlights that the nature of the stressor itself is heavily dependent on gender roles[6].

Histories of self-harm indicate that while the total volumetric score of hopelessness or distress might balance out across genders, the underlying triggers remain strictly gender-specific[7][8]. For instance, substance-linked distress and employment crises are more pronounced among males[9], whereas severe marital distress and household friction emerge as primary triggers in female clinical samples[10]. This underscores a crucial methodological reality: relying solely on global cumulative stress scores can mask critical, qualitative differences in how genders experience life crises.

There are numerous studies that have been conducted to explore the difference in stress level among male and female population. Most of the studies around the world clearly mentioned that women are more prone towards stress than men. In a large-scale study in Kenya, it has found that girls have very high level of stress in almost every stressful situation like finance, family or career, as compare to boys[11][12][13][14]. In a longitudinal study men have shown lower stressor and higher positive stress or counter stress than women[15]. There are many Indian

researchers who are also showing the same trend. In a study conducted upon college students both the gender groups felt almost similar stress levels but the level of cortisol is higher among girls than boys[16]. During the pandemic period it has also been found very clearly that the women are higher scorers on stressful event scales than men[17]. So it doesn't matter whatever the circumstances, the woman seems easily caught in stressful life events.

The interaction between marriage and gender makes a vital impact upon mental distress among people. There are many cultures and religions around the world but the fact is that married women are more prone towards mental distress than men whereas single, divorced and separated people show more distress than married couples. Some of the countries around the world like-Canada, Iran, China, Finland and India, studies have prominently shown the same pattern of distress among married women[18][19][20][21]. But contradictions have been found in elderly people where both the genders showed equal distress, denying the fact that the women are having more distress than men in their singlehood status. The parenting by the divorced people have also been found problematic for their college going children[22]. In an Indian study[23]. It has reported that the financial weaker group of society, the sociological factors like age, gender and marital status is a prominent factor for mental distress just because of gender discrimination, domestic violence and substance use.

It is very clear by a detailed survey of literature upon marital status and gender's interactional effect upon mental distress is alarming. The present study is an attempt to reconfirm the fact that marital status and gender have a significant producer of stress.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Objective of the Study:**

- **To find out the presumptive stressful life events among married and divorced people.**
- **To find out the status of presumptive stressful life events among male and female**

### **Hypotheses**

**H<sub>1</sub>** There will be a significant difference in presumptive stressful life events in male and female participants.

**H<sub>2</sub>** There will be a significant difference in presumptive stressful life events in married and divorced participants.

**H<sub>3</sub>** An interactional effect of marital status and gender will affect presumptive stressful life events.

### **Participants and Sampling Technique:**

A non-probability, purposive-cum-snowball sampling technique was employed to select the participants for the present study. This approach was chosen considering the sensitive socio-cultural nature of the research topic and the inherent challenges in identifying and accessing specific target groups, particularly divorced individuals, within the regional context.

The sample comprised a total of 120 participants, evenly distributed across a 2×2 factorial framework based on Marital Status (Married vs. Divorced) and Gender (Male vs. Female). The sample was strictly categorized into four balanced sub-groups:

1. Married Males (n=25)
2. Married Females (n=25)
3. Divorced Males (n=25)
4. Divorced Females (n=25)

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:**

- **Inclusion Criteria:** Participants aged between 25 and 55 years, currently residing in semi-urban or urban setups, and fluent in reading English/Hindi were included. For the divorced cohorts, individuals who had legally finalized their divorce or had been living under formal marital separation for at least six months were included. For the married cohorts, individuals currently living with their spouse were selected.
- **Exclusion Criteria:** Individuals undergoing active psychiatric treatment for chronic psychotic disorders or those facing sudden catastrophic personal losses unrelated to marital status (e.g., recent natural calamity) within the last three months were excluded to

avoid confounding variables in stress baseline measurement.

**Tool:**

To assess the major stressor among population the Presumptive Stressful life Event Scale (PSLES) was used. The scale was developed and standardised by Dr. Gurmeet Singh et.al. in 1984. The scale comprises total 51 stressful life events as a checklist. The score for each item has assigned according to their vulnerability for a person’s life. So, the highest score is 95 which is for ‘death of spouse’ and lowest score 20 is for ‘going to a pleasure trip or pilgrimage’. The participant has expected only to tick whichever event is faced by them in past one year

**Procedure:**

To initiate data collection, a digital version of the Presumptive Stressful Life Events Scale (PSLES) was hosted via an anonymous online platform. Primary contact points within the researcher’s professional and personal network were utilized as initial seeds (Purposive Sampling). These initial participants and network contacts then assisted in identifying and referring subsequent participants from their respective circles who met the inclusion criteria (Snowball Sampling).

To address potential social social-desirability bias and hesitation, strict ethical protocols were maintained. No personally identifiable information (such as names, email addresses, or contact numbers) was collected, ensuring absolute anonymity. Participants were briefed about the purely academic nature of the study, and informed consent was obtained digitally before they proceeded to the questionnaire.

**Results**

**Table-1**

**the Mean value and standard deviation of each sample group**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean (M)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (SD)</b>
<b>Male</b>	Married	25	134.16	66.86
	Divorced	25	486.36	139.77
	<b>Total Male</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>310.26</b>	<b>208.57</b>
<b>Female</b>	Married	25	240.28	132.86
	Divorced	25	405.08	133.09
	<b>Total Female</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>322.68</b>	<b>155.03</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>Married (Combined)</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>187.22</b>	<b>118.06</b>
	<b>Divorced (Combined)</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>445.72</b>	<b>141.52</b>

The above table-1 is showing that the married male sample group (N=25) have mean score 134.16 whereas SD is 66.86 whether divorced male sample group have secured (N=25), M=486.36 and SD is 139.77. The overall male section has secured (N=50) M=310.26 and SD is 208.57. When we see the women sample group the entire population(N=50) have M= 322.68 and SD is 155.03. The group of married women have shown (N=25) M=240.28 and SD is 132.86 whereas the divorced women group have secured (N=25) M=405.08 and SD is 133.09. the entire married participant (N=50) has shown M=187.22 and SD is 118.06, whether the total

divorced population have shown M=445.72 and SD is 141.52.

**Table 2: Two-Way ANOVA Summary Table**

**Two-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for PSLES Stress Scores:**

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-value	Significance (p-value)
<b>Gender</b> (Main Effect)	3,844.00	1	3,844.00	0.25	.618 (Not Sig.)
<b>Marital Status</b> (Main Effect)	1,670,544.64	1	1,670,544.64	108.62	<b>&lt; .001 (Highly Sig.)</b>
<b>Gender X Marital status</b> (Interaction effect)	100,236.16	1	100,236.16	6.52	<b>.012 (Significant)</b>
<b>Error</b> (Within Groups)	1,476,575.20	96	15,381.00		
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,251,200.00</b>	<b>99</b>			

The above table-2 is showing that the main effect of gender upon PSLES is found not significant where F value is 0.25, but the main effect of marital status is found highly significant where F value is 108.62. The interaction effect of both variables, gender and marital status is significantly high impact on PSLES where F value is 6.52.

**Summary and Discussion**

The entire process of data collection and analysis has produced many valuable facts and findings. For the evaluation of the differential impact upon a sample group on psychological distress, descriptive statistics were used specifically means and standard deviations were computed. The total sample (N = 100) was equally distributed in four distinct sample group (n = 25 per cell) based on a 2 x 2 factorial research design (Gender x Marital Status). The cumulative stress metrics obtained via the Presumptive Stressful Life Events Scale (PSLES) demonstrate substantial descriptive variances among the groups.

Within the married sample group, female participants exhibited a higher mean stress profile (M = 240.28, SD = 132.86) relative to their male counterparts, who reported the lowest baseline distress among the entire sample (M = 134.16, SD = 66.86). On the contrary, this pattern underwent a stark reversal within the divorced sample group. Divorced male participants demonstrated a profound escalation in cumulative presumptive stress (M = 486.36, SD = 139.77), representing the highest stress concentration in the study, whereas divorced females presented a comparatively lower, though elevated, stress index (M = 405.08, SD = 133.09). Aggregate evaluation indicated a lower stress level for married individuals (M = 187.22, SD = 118.06) compared to the severely higher stress profiles of divorced individuals (M = 445.72, SD = 141.52).

To determine whether the observed descriptive variations attained statistical significance, a 2 x 2

Between-Subjects Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was calculated. This inferential model systematically evaluated the main effects of Gender, Marital Status, and their subsequent Two-Way Interaction Effect on the dependent variable (PSLES scores).

The empirical outputs of the parametric evaluation are structured as follows:

- **Main Effect of Gender:** The inferential analysis revealed a non-significant main effect for gender on total presumptive stress scores,  $F = 0.25$  which is not significant. This finding demonstrates that when collapsing across marital categories, the overall volume of perceived life event stress does not structurally vary between males ( $M = 310.26$ ) and females ( $M = 322.68$ ). Consequently, the first null hypothesis (**H1**), which posited no significant gender-based differences in stressful life event is accepted
- **Main Effect of Marital Status:** A highly significant main effect was established for marital status,  $F = 108.62$  and probability is found significant at .01 level. It means the value of this F-ratio confirms that the transition from a sustained marital framework to marital dissolution induces a profound mental instability. Statistically this deep analysis for accumulated stress that cannot be attributed to sampling error. Based on this highly significant variance, the second null hypothesis (**H2**), which says no significant difference will be found for marital status, is strictly rejected.
- **Two-Way Interaction Effect (Gender x Marital Status):** Crucially, the analysis yielded a statistically significant two-way interaction effect between gender and marital status,  $F = 6.52$ , which was found significant at .01 level. The significance of this interaction mathematically confirms that the impact of marital status on presumptive stress is critically moderated by the gender of the participant, meaning the psychological toll of being married or divorced operates differently for men and women. Accordingly, the third null hypothesis (**H3**) which says no interaction effect, is **strictly rejected**.

Because the interaction effect (Gender x Marital Status) is statistically significant, a simple main effects perspective is required to interpret the real-world implications of the data:

The significant interaction establishes that while the institution of marriage functions as a highly potent emotional and psychological buffering mechanism for males, keeping their stress levels exceptionally low ( $M = 134.16$ ) the disruption of this state via divorce triggers an acute, unbuffered crisis. This results in an unprecedented surge in stress ( $M = 486.36$ ), this causes divorced males, the most vulnerable demographic subgroup within this population.

For female participants, the trajectory is distinctly different. Married women operate at a significantly higher baseline stress level ( $M = 240.28$ ) than married men, which points toward systemic role-strain and domestic asymmetric burdens. However, upon experiencing a divorce, although their stress levels predictably increase ( $M = 405.08$ ), the inflation rate is noticeably less severe than that observed in males. This distinct quantitative divergence statistically substantiates the presence of gender-specific coping mechanisms, highlighting that females potentially got advantage by informal social safety nets and emotional processing channels more effectively than males when facing excessive marital crises.

## Conclusion

The study has revealed very clearly that the divorce is a difficult situation for any people. The male divorced are suffering from high level of stressful life event than divorced women whereas married women are more prone towards stressor than married male. The comparison between overall married and divorced shown significantly high stress among divorced than married.

## References

- [1] G. Singh, D. Kaur, and H. Kaur, "Presumptive stressful life events scale (PSLES)—A new stressful life events scale for use in India," *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 26, pp. 107–114, 1984.
- [2] P. Parakh, "Gender issues in life event research in India: A critical appraisal of the presumptive stressful life events scale," *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 19–21, 2011. doi: 10.1016/j.ajp.2011.01.001.
- [3] M. Davis, K. Matthews, and E. Twamley, "Is life more difficult on Mars or Venus? A meta-

- analytic review of sex differences in major and minor life events,” *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, vol. 21, pp. 83–97, 1999. doi: 10.1007/BF02895038.
- [4] M. Matud, “Gender differences in stress and coping styles,” *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 37, pp. 1401–1415, 2004. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2004.01.010.
- [5] S. Soman, S. Bhat, K. Latha, and S. Praharaj, “Gender differences in perceived social support and stressful life events in depressed patients,” *East Asian Archives of Psychiatry*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 22–29, 2016.
- [6] V. Menon, S. Kattimani, S. Sarkar, and A. Muthuramalingam, “Gender differences among suicide attempters attending a crisis intervention clinic in South India,” *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*, vol. 24, pp. 64–69, 2015. doi: 10.4103/0972-6748.160936.
- [7] Borgohain, D. Bhuyan, and S. Chandel, “Exploration of life events and perceived stress in female patients admitted in the psychiatry department of a tertiary care hospital,” *Open Journal of Psychiatry and Allied Sciences*, vol. 11, pp. 105–110, 2020. doi: 10.5958/2394-2061.2020.00027.0.
- [8] S. Shaik, R. Rajkumar, V. Menon, and S. Sarkar, “Gender, life events, and depression: An exploratory study,” *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, vol. 39, pp. 330–335, 2017.
- [9] L. Tamres, D. Janicki, and V. Helgeson, “Sex differences in coping behavior: A meta-analytic review and an examination of relative coping,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol. 6, pp. 2–30, 2002. doi: 10.1207/S15327957PSPR0601\_1.
- [10] G. McLeod, L. Horwood, D. Fergusson, and J. Boden, “Life-stress and reactivity by gender in a longitudinal birth cohort at 30 and 35 years,” *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, vol. 51, pp. 1385–1394, 2016. doi: 10.1007/s00127-016-1254-z.
- [11] C. Costa, G. Briguglio, S. Mondello, M. Teodoro, M. Pollicino, A. Canalella, F. Verduci, S. Italia, and C. Fenga, “Perceived stress in a gender perspective: A survey in a population of unemployed subjects of Southern Italy,” *Frontiers in Public Health*, vol. 9, 2021. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2021.640454.
- [12] B. Graves, M. Hall, C. Dias-Karch, M. Haischer, and C. Apter, “Gender differences in perceived stress and coping among college students,” *PLoS ONE*, vol. 16, 2021. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0255634.
- [13] M. Mbiriri, “Gender and age differences in perceived stress among students in a selected public university in Kenya,” *Kabarak Journal of Research & Innovation*, 2022. doi: 10.58216/kjri.v12i1.65.
- [14] H. Ashraf and N. Nawaz, “A comparative study of life satisfaction and psychological stress levels among male and female allied health college students,” *Journal of Social & Health Sciences*, 2022. doi: 10.58398/0001.000004.
- [15] C. Barbosa-Leiker, M. Kostick, M. Lei, S. McPherson, V. Roper, T. Hoekstra, and B. Wright, “Measurement invariance of the perceived stress scale and latent mean differences across gender and time,” *Stress and Health*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 253–260, 2013. doi: 10.1002/smi.2463.
- [16] A. Batabyal, A. Bhattacharya, M. Thaker, and S. Mukherjee, “A longitudinal study of perceived stress and cortisol responses in an undergraduate student population from India,” *PLoS ONE*, vol. 16, 2019. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0252579.
- [17] B. Chhetri, L. Goyal, M. Mittal, and G. Battineni, “Estimating the prevalence of stress among Indian students during the COVID-19 pandemic: A cross-sectional study from India,” *Journal of Taibah University Medical Sciences*, vol. 16, pp. 260–267, 2021. doi: 10.1016/j.jtumed.2020.12.012.
- [18] A. Bulloch, J. Williams, D. Lavorato, and S. Patten, “The depression and marital status relationship is modified by both age and gender,” *Journal of Affective Disorders*, vol. 223, pp. 65–68, 2017. doi: 10.1016/j.jad.2017.06.007.
- [19] L. Zhao, K. Zhang, Y. Gao, Z. Jia, and S. Han, “The relationship between gender, marital status and depression among Chinese middle-aged and older people: Mediation by subjective well-being and moderation by degree of digitization,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 13, 2022. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.923597.
- [20] N. Krause, D. Dowler, J. Liang, S. Gu, N. Yatomi, and Y. Chuang, “Sex, marital status, and

- psychological distress in later life: A comparative analysis,” *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 127–146, 1995. doi: 10.1016/0167-4943(95)00633-V.
- [21] S. Viertiö, O. Kiviruusu, M. Piirtola, J. Kaprio, T. Korhonen, M. Marttunen, and J. Suvisaari, “Factors contributing to psychological distress in the working population, with a special reference to gender difference,” *BMC Public Health*, vol. 21, 2020. doi: 10.1186/s12889-021-10560-y.
- [22] L. Geshica and S. Musabiq, “Parents’ marital status and psychological distress among college students,” in *Proc. 2nd Int. Conf. Intervention and Applied Psychology (ICIAP 2018)*, 2019. doi: 10.2991/iciap-18.2019.31.
- [23] D. Singh, S. Nasir, J. Sharma, L. Giménez-Llort, and M. Shahnawaz, “Psychological distress in low-income and economically marginalized populations in India: Protective and risk factors,” *Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 14, 2024. doi: 10.3390/bs14020092.