

# Comparing Self-identified Feminist and Non-feminist Muslim Women's Desires for Marriage and Children

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**Abstract:** The research aims to compare feminists with non-feminist women in terms of their attitudes and desires for marriage and children. The current study was a project to partially fulfill the requirements for the award of the master's degree in Clinical Psychology at Shifa Tameer-e Millat University, Islamabad. Data was collected from 264 unmarried Muslim women studying at different universities in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The independent sample t-test is used to compare feminist and non-feminist women's desires for marriage and children. The results indicate that there are no differences between feminists and non-feminists in terms of their desire for marriage and children. However, significant differences are present in their attitude towards marriage but the effect size is small.

**Keywords:** Feminists, Non-feminists, Marriage, Children.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The research aims to compare feminists with non-feminist women in terms of their attitudes and desires for marriage and children. A study similar to the current study was conducted by Hartwell et al. (2014) who compared feminist and non-feminist women in terms of their desires for marriage and children. Results showed that feminists and non-feminists are different when it comes to their desire for marriage and children; with the feminists having a lower desire for marriage and children than non-feminist women.

Kaufman (2005) argues that women with liberal ideologies have a lower desire for marriage and want fewer children than women who follow traditional gender roles. Erchull et al. (2010) found that women who were accepting of the female's traditional role had more desire for marriage and children, and were more likely to do household work and looked after the child, than the women with liberal attitudes. Blakemore et al. (2005) have found that women who label themselves as feminist and are career-oriented have a lower desire for marriage. Women who are accepting of traditional gender roles and want to embrace parenthood in the future have strong desires for marriage.

Gerson (1984) studied the association between the feminist identity and the desire for children and the benefits and disadvantages of having children. The results show that feminists had a lower desire for children and associated more disadvantages attached to rearing children. Blakemore et al. (2005) also substantiated the phenomenon that feminist women have a lower desire for children.

Feminists like Chambers (2017) and Tyler (2015) are against marriage and feminists are believed to be anti-motherhood (Corradi, 2020; Dillaway & Pare, 2008). However, research has yielded different results. For instance, Liss and Erchull (2012) found that feminist mothers were more involved in parenting tasks such as lactating, picking up their babies, and sleeping with their children; and were more attentive toward many other parenting behaviors as compared to non-feminist mothers. Feminist women have a desire to embrace motherhood and are more involved in attachment parenting and childcare activities (Friedman, 2008).

Blakemore et al. (2005) showed that feminist women are more career oriented and have a lower desire for marriage and children. But contrary to it, Mcquillian et al. (2008) reveal that women who do jobs and give importance to their careers, also give attention and significance to motherhood. Similarly, Novack and Novack (1996) have found that women consider marriage more important than pursuing their careers.

Studies conducted in South Asian Muslim countries have shown that women have desires for marriage and children because they consider marriage and having children a very important component of society and a religious obligation. According to Abdi et al. (2020) and Khalaf and Callister (1997), Muslim culture emphasizes and gives a lot of significance to motherhood due to which women desire to have children. Women in South Asian Muslim countries want to have children because having children makes them complete, strengthens the spousal relationship, and protects women from having divorce (Khalaf & Callister, 1997).

The desires for marriage and children have been studied in South Asian countries but such desires have not been studied in relation to the feminist identity. Therefore, the purpose of the research is to see whether the feminist identity has any influence on women's desire for marriage and children and then compare these desires with non-feminist women's desire for marriage and children. Multiple studies (Blakemore et al., 2005; Erchull et al., 2010; Hartwell et al., 2014; Kaufman, 2005) in the west have shown that feminist identity reduces the desire for marriage and children. In Pakistan, no research has been conducted that linked feminist identity to the desire for motherhood and marriage, and such desires have never been compared with non-feminist women. Marriage and motherhood are very important components of society. Therefore, it is worth exploring how feminist and non-feminist women view marriage and motherhood and how different they are from each other in terms of their desires for marriage and children.

### **Objectives**

The objective of the research is to compare the feminists and the non-feminists in terms of their desire to get married and have children.

Further, apart from exploring desires, the research is aimed to see the general attitudes that feminist and non-feminist women have toward the institution of marriage.

### **Operational Definition**

#### ***Feminists***

Women who after reading the definition of feminism, answered the self-identification question i.e. Do you consider yourself a feminist- and said yes were identified as a feminist.

#### ***Non-Feminists***

Women who after reading the definition of feminism, answered the self-identification question i.e. Do you consider yourself a feminist and said no were identified as non-feminist.

### **Hypothesis**

Feminists and non-feminist are different in their attitudes and desires for marriage and children.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were followed as per requirement. Initially, the study got approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Shifa Tameer-e- Millat University before conducting the research. After the research got approved by the committee, the process of data collection began.

## **2. METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The research uses the quantitative method. The research is a comparative study that involves comparing feminist and non-feminist women's desire for marriage and children using quantitative methods.

### **Sample**

The sample comprises of unmarried Muslim women studying at different universities in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The sample consists of females with ages 18 to 29. The participants were females pursuing their bachelor's and master's degrees.

Data were collected from the two cities due to the time constraints of the thesis that had to be completed in six months. Data were collected from females through convenient sampling. A total of 264 women participated in the study.

#### ***Inclusion Criteria***

The study included only women participants. Unmarried women with ages 18 to 29 were included in the study.

#### ***Exclusion Criteria***

Married women, divorced, and widows were not included in the study. Women of age 30 and above are not included. It was difficult to collect data from women above 30 because the data has been collected mostly from university students doing bachelor's and master's degrees where the ages of those students normally range between 18 to 29.

#### ***Instrument***

The following measures were used to collect data.

#### ***Demographic Sheet***

The demographic sheet included questions about age, education, and socioeconomic status. While handing over the questionnaires, participants are debriefed again that married women should not fill out the questionnaires.

#### ***Self-identification Question***

The self-identification question i.e., Do you consider yourself a feminist; was asked from the participants in a yes or no format. Participants who answered "yes" were identified as feminists, and the participants who answered "no" were identified as non-feminists. The self-identification question was used to classify women as feminist and non-feminist as the previous research (Erchull et al., 2012; Hartwell et al., 2014; Hurt et al., 2007; Siegel & Calogero, 2019) used the same format for classifying feminist and non-feminist women.

But in addition, the current study also provided a definition of feminism before the self-identification question was asked. Every scholar defines feminism in their own way, on the basis of their own beliefs and understandings; but the one definition which is seen as the standard definition of feminism is that feminism stands for equality (Saeed & Leghari, 2019).

Therefore, the definition of feminism from the Oxford dictionary was provided to the participants. "Feminism is the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men". The participants read the definition and then answered the self-identification question.

The marital scales developed by Park and Rosen in 2013 are used in the study. The two subscales of the marital scales i.e. intent to marry and general attitude towards marriage are used in the current study. Apart from marital scales, the desire for children scale developed by Rholes et al. in 1997 is also used in the current study.

#### ***Intent to Marry Scale***

The research study used the "Intent to Marry Scale". The scale consists of three items that will ask questions related to the intent to get married. The scale responses were provided on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The minimum score that could be obtained on the scale is 0 and the highest score that can be obtained on the scale is 18. Higher scores indicate a high desire for marriage. The reliability of the scale is .88

#### ***General Attitude towards Marriage Scale***

The scale consists of 10 items. The items ask about the attitude women have towards marriage and how women generally perceive marriage. The scale responses were provided on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The minimum score that can be achieved on the scale is 0 and the highest that could be achieved on the scale is 60. Higher scores indicate a more positive attitude towards marriage. The reliability of the scale is .88.

#### ***Desire to have Children Scale***

The research used the Desire to have Children Scale. The scale consists of 12 items that ask questions related to the desire to have children. The responses were provided on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The lowest score that can be obtained on the scale is 0 and the highest score that can be obtained on the scale is 80. A high score indicates a high desire for children. The reliability of the scale is .89.

## Procedure

### Main Study

Data was collected from 300 women participants. The 36 responses that did not match the inclusion criteria of the research and the questionnaires that contain multiple neutral responses were discarded. Therefore, data from 264 women were included in the research. The data was collected from the participants through face-to-face interaction. Informed consent was taken from the participants and then the questionnaires were distributed among the participants. The participants were debriefed about the topic of the research and the questionnaire. The data was collected from the universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Data was collected from unmarried Muslim females pursuing bachelor's and master's degrees.

### Statistical Analysis

After collecting the data, SPSS 25.0 was used for running the analysis. An Independent sample *t*-test was used to compare and find out the difference between two groups i.e., feminist and non-feminist women in terms of their attitudes and desires for marriage and children.

## 3. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of feminist and non-feminist women. Out of the 264 women participants, 80 women identified themselves as non-feminists 184 women identified themselves as feminists.

**Table 1: Demographics of Participants**

Variable	Feminists (n=184)		Non-feminists (n=80)		Full sample (N= 264)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Age						
18-23	134	51.5	63	23.9	199	75.4
24-29	48	18.2	17	6.4	65	24.6
SES						
Upper class	6	2.3	3	1.1	9	3.4
Upper middle	94	35.6	36	13.6	130	49.2
Middle class	80	30.3	41	15.5	121	45.8
Lower class	4	1.5	0	0	4	1.5
Education						
Bachelor	153	58	64	24.2	217	82.2
Master	31	11.7	16	6.1	47	17.8
Ethnicity						
Punjabi	130	49.2	52	19.7	182	68.9
Sindhi	4	1.5	2	0.8	6	2.3
Balochi	2	0.8	1	0.4	3	1.1
Pakhtoon	13	4.9	8	3	21	8
Kashmiri	9	3.4	6	2.3	15	5.7
Others	26	9.8	11	4.2	37	14

Note. SES= Socio-economic Status.

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of variables. The intent to marry was measured through the intent to marry scale. The average mean score on the intent to marry scale is 9 (*SD* =1.86) The minimum score of the participants obtained on the scale is 3 and the maximum score obtained on the scale is 14. Attitude toward marriage is measured through the general attitude toward marriage scale. The average mean score on the scale is 30 (*SD* =4.42).

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics of variables**

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std.Dev.	Min.	Max.
GAMS	264	32.82	4.42	17	44
IMS	264	10.29	1.86	3	14
DCS	264	51.00	6.36	28	67

Valid N (listwise) 264

*Note.* IMS= Intent to Marry Scale, GAMS= General Attitude towards Marriage Scale, DCS= Desire for Children Scale.

The minimum score of the participants obtained on the general attitude toward marriage scale is 17 and the maximum score is 44. The desire for children is measured through the desire for children scale. The average mean score on the scale is 40 ( $SD = 6.36$ ). The minimum score of the participants obtained on the scale is 28 and the maximum score obtained is 67.

Table 3 shows the mean differences between the two groups i.e., feminists and nonfeminists in terms of their attitudes and desires for marriage and children. Results  $t(262) = .815, p > 0.05$  indicate that there are no significant differences between feminists and non-feminists in their desires for marriage with both feminists and non-feminists desiring marriage. The average mean score on the scale is 9. Scores above the average mean score indicate a high desire for marriage. Feminists and non-feminists both have a mean score of 10.3 indicating that both feminists and non-feminists have a desire for marriage.

**Table 3: Independent t-test for Differences between Feminists and Non-feminists in Attitudes and Desires for Marriage and Children.**

Variables	Feminists (n=184)		Non-feminists (n=80)		$t(262)$ $p$		Cohen's $d$	
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$				
IMS	10.35	1.80	10.31	1.99	.815	.416		0.02
GAMS	33.31	4.35	31.70	4.41	2.745	.007		0.36
DCS	50.93	6.61	51.16	5.79	.267	.790		0.03

*Note.* IMS= Intent to Marry Scale, GAMS= General Attitude towards Marriage Scale, DCS= Desire for Children Scale.

Table 3 further shows  $t(262) = 2.745, p < 0.05$  there is a significant difference between the feminist and non-feminist attitudes towards marriage. But the effect size is small. As the average mean score on the scale is 30. Scores above the average mean score indicate a positive attitude toward marriage. Feminists and non-feminists have a mean score of 33.3 and 31.7 respectively which indicates that both feminists and non-feminists have a positive attitude towards marriage but feminists have a more positive attitude towards marriage than non-feminists.

Table 3 shows  $t(262) = .267, p > 0.05$  that there is no significant difference between the feminists and non-feminists in terms of their desires for children with both feminists and non-feminists having a desire for children. The average mean score on the scale is 40. Scores above the average mean score indicate a high desire for children. Feminists and non-feminists have a mean score of 50.9 and 51.6 respectively which indicates that both feminists and non-feminists desire children.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results of the current study are different from the result of a similar study (Hartwell et al., 2014) conducted in the West. In the current study, the feminist and non-feminist women do not have any differences in their desire for marriage and children. They are similar to each other in their desire for children and marriage with both desiring marriage and children. I believe the results are different from the West because the religion of Islam and the social, and cultural dynamics of an Asian country i.e., Pakistan have a strong role in influencing women's desire for marriage and children. The social and cultural factors are much stronger than the feminist identity in influencing women's desire for marriage and children.

Society influences women's desire to get married. In our culture, women face more negative consequences if she stays unmarried as compared to men due to which women may develop a desire to get married. (Williams, 2009). Another reason that may contribute to both feminists and non-feminists desiring marriage is the societal and cultural pressure that makes women choose marriage. Multiple studies (Himawan, 2019; Situmorang, 2007; Williams, 2009) conducted in Asian countries have shown that Asian cultures impose pressure on women to get married because society and culture view

unmarried women as defective. Society views unmarried women in a negative light and unmarried women are often criticized by society for their single status. If the women are not married then they are considered to be undesirable. Therefore, women develop a desire to get married to relieve and save themselves from the societal criticism, and stigmatization that they have to bear due to their status as unmarried women.

In order to live freely and with respect in society it is a must for women in our culture to get married. Therefore, the feminist identity in Pakistan is not strong enough to influence women's desire regarding marriage and children. Instead, the social and cultural beliefs themselves are strongly influencing women's desires for marriage and children above and beyond their feminist identities. Society has made marriage a social norm and has placed a lot of emphasis on it that marriage has now become a powerful institute and exerts this power to influence women's decision to get married. Card (1996) also argues that marriage exerts a strong power and influence over women due to which many women develop the perception that marriage is necessary for living a happy peaceful life. Therefore, holding such a perception may lead to women desiring marriage irrespective of their feminist identity.

Religion has an impact on women's desire for marriage (Gubernskaya, 2010). In Islam, a strong emphasis has been laid upon getting married. Many people decide to get married because they want to fulfill their religious obligation. (Manap et al., 2013). All the participants in the study were Muslim women therefore, the Islamic teachings may have played a role in influencing women's desire for marriage.

According to the religion of Islam, premarital sex is a sin. Sex is a biological innate necessity and Islam does not permit it outside of marriage. The only way a person in Islam can have sex is through marriage. Therefore, women whether feminists or non-feminists may desire marriage to have sex and save themselves from committing a sin by engaging in premarital sex. Manap et al. (2013) also found that Muslims get married to avoid engaging in sexual activities outside of marriage.

Religion also influences the desire to have children. Women desire children because Islam glorifies motherhood and gives a lot of significance to it (Abdi et al., 1997; Khalaf & Callister, 1997; Osman, 2015). Therefore, due to Religious emphasis on marriage and children, Muslim women desire both marriage and children. This indicates that

Muslim identity is much stronger than the feminist identity in influencing women's desire for marriage and children.

Hertog (2009) mentions that in Asian countries if a woman wants to embrace motherhood then she has to get married because giving birth to a child without being married will lead to a societal backlash. Unlike the west, women in Pakistan cannot have children without getting married. Because it is not accepted by their culture and law. Children born without marriage are termed illegal and hold low status in society. According to Hertog (2009), there is a strong relationship between getting married, having children, societal stigmatization, and legal bigotry. Therefore, the only way for women to have children and fulfill their desires of embracing motherhood without being subjected to discrimination, injustice, and societal backlash is to get married. Therefore, feminists in the current study desire marriage and children irrespective of their feminist identification.

For many years, there was a negative association between life satisfaction and becoming a mother but now changes have occurred and the association between the two is positive (Preisner et al., 2018). This may be happening in Pakistan due to the efforts of the feminist movement that resulted in women getting an education and continuing their jobs even after marriage and children. The social norms have become less strict and less judgmental and women are now doing jobs along with looking after their children at the same time and are not subjected to societal backlash. Preisner et al. (2018) found that the societal rules which dictate that women should stay in their homes and engage in childcare have become more flexible and this flexibility has reduced the pressure on women making them more content and happier with the decision of embracing motherhood. The flexibility in these social norms may be one of the reasons feminists in the current study desire children. Feminists have long been criticizing motherhood, as it deprives women of their right to do jobs and pursue their careers. Now feminists are able to pursue their careers along with having children, therefore, the desire for children will increase as now feminists will no longer see children as hindrances in their way to achieving goals.

Women want to have children because women feel incomplete without motherhood. Motherhood is biological and innate and the desire to become a mother is fulfilling for women. According to Osman (2015), Muslim women desire children because they view them as a source of satisfaction, happiness, and peace. Motherhood is linked with life satisfaction (Preisner et al., 2018). Some feminists de Maffenne (2004) and O'Reilly (2008) have also viewed motherhood as empowering. According to O'Reilly (2008), the institution of motherhood may be patriarchal but mothering - becoming a mother, loving, and taking care of the child i.e., her personal experiences and journey of motherhood are very empowering.

Therefore, perceiving the act of mothering positively may lead to the desire for motherhood. Feminists have a more positive attitude towards marriage and they desire marriage and children because feminists tend to view marriage and childcare responsibilities in egalitarian terms.

Feminist women expect that their relationships will be egalitarian and they will have an equal division of childcare responsibility (Yoder et al., 2007). Feminists think that they will stand for equality hence making the division of child-care and marriage feminist in the process. The idea of making childcare responsibility and marriage “feminist” by demanding equality is desirable for feminists and may be the reason for the increase in their desires for marriage and children.

The feminists in this study have desires for marriage and children and have a positive attitude towards marriage because the amalgamation of our cultural and familial upbringing, religion, and the social and cultural norms of Asian society are so powerful that they play a strong role in influencing the women’s desires for marriage and children above and beyond their feminist identities i.e., feminist identities have little influence on women attitude, choice, and desire for marriage and children.

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